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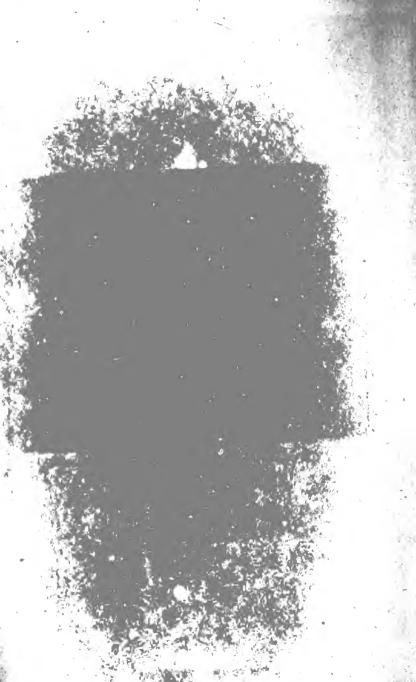
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WALTER'S WORD.



WALTER'S WORD.

A Nobel.

ВΥ

JAMES PAYN,

AUTHOR OF "LOST SIR MASSINGBERD," "AT HER MERCY," ETC. ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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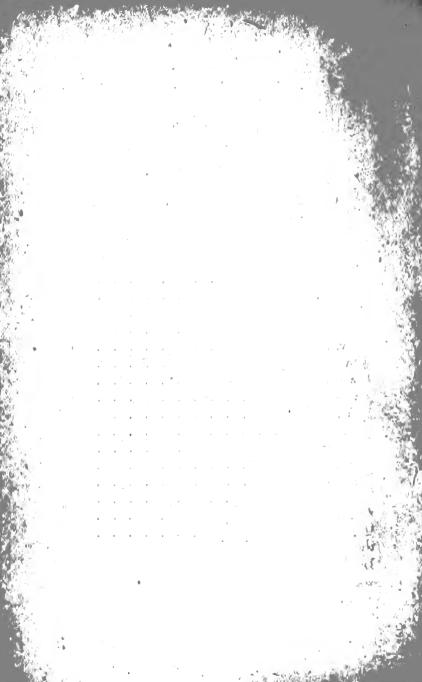
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CONTENTS

OF

OF THE SECOND VOLUME.

CHAP.						PAGE
I.	WAR IS DECLARED				•	1
II.	A CONFIDENTIAL SITTING .					17
III.	SIR REGINALD IS FRANKNESS	ITS	ELI	7		33
IV.	THE NEW BRIDGE					56
v.	BANISHED FROM EDEN					75
VI.	A FRIEND IN NEED					97
VII.	IN THE BOTANICAL GARDENS					116
VIII.	HOW HE DID IT					135
IX.	NEW LODGINGS		•			145
x.	DANGER					163
XI.	THE CHASE IN THE CALM .					183
XII.	TO THE RESCUE					204
xIII.	ON THE ROAD					217
XIV.	OUTDOOR LODGINGS					236
xv.	THE CAPTAIN AND HIS CAPTI	VE				250
XVI.	BRIGAND DISCIPLINE					267





WALTER'S WORD.

CHAPTER I.

WAR IS DECLARED.

INNER-TIME, and after dinner-time, at Willowbank, on this momentous occasion, had thus, we may say, been very successfully got over for all concerned. Thanks to the old merchant's forbearance, or respect for the baronetcy, and to the captain's intrepid behaviour, all disagreeable topics, as well as those embarrassing silences which are almost as bad, had been avoided. It was true that the talk had been confined to these two gentlemen; but Lotty and Lilian (who had also contrived to maintain with one another a conversation in an

undertone full of interest for themselves) were thankful to have been excused from taking part in it; and Walter was by no means displeased to find himself secondfiddle-or rather, playing no instrument at all—in the newly united family band. he could only have escaped observation, and above all, interrogation, for the rest of the evening, he would have thought himself fortunate indeed; it would have been enough for him to watch the others in silence: to speculate, though with pain and sorrow, upon the causes that had produced the alteration in poor Lotty's looks; how it had come to pass that her pretty ways had vanished, and whether they had been stamped out for ever by poverty and neglect, or if, under the sun of her new-found prosperity, they might grow and bloom again. Upon the whole, he was not hopeful of her; she seemed to him like some bright and shapely vessel which had struck against a hard and jagged rock, and had only not gone down, and that its happy crew-" Youth at the helm, and Pleasure at the prow"-were dead and drowned. Nor did he hesitate to identify that rock with her husband. He was certainly indebted to Selwyn for having caused matters so far to go off so swimmingly that evening, without hitch or kink; but he was not grateful to him for it; he resented (though he felt that the captain was but acting a part) that he should seem so animated and careless, while his wife looked so wan and woful even in her new-found home. That she should sit with her sister's hand fast clasped in hers, so silent, and, as it seemed to him, always on the brink of tears, filled him with pity but also with anger against the man who had brought her to such a pass; and even that she could not give himself one smile of welcome or recognition—though that was made impossible by the necessity of the case-irritated him against the captain. Lilian indeed smiled upon him brightly, nay, gratefully, whenever he looked her way; but she too was pale and thoughtful, and had scarcely addressed a word to him throughout the evening. It was of course but natural that she should be occupied with her sister, and that her face should somewhat mirror that of Lotty; but he felt it hard that the reconciliation in which he himself had had so large a share should bear such bitter fruit for him. Perhaps too, though he would not have confessed as much, he was somewhat jealous of the strides that the captain was making in the favour of his father-in-law; not that he wished him not to gain his good opinion and all the benefits that might flow from it, but that somehow he felt that whatever influence Sir Reginald might acquire with Mr. Brown would be used to his own disadvantage. He had more than one secret of Selwyn's in his keeping—especially that one connected with Nellie Neale—the revelation of which might have done him serious harm; and though he would have perished rather than reveal any one of them, Selwyn might not give him credit for such chivalry, and in that case would have cause to fear and therefore to intrigue against him. A man that would ill-treat his own wife—for he had illtreated her—and especially such a winsome and delicate creature as Lotty, could not be expected to entertain honourable ideas or indeed to stick at anything. Walter had thought hard things of his former friend more than once and had repented of them;

but now he entertained such thoughts without repentance.

He was standing by the drawing-room table with his coffee-cup in his hand, pretending to look at some engravings, but in reality occupied in these bitter reflections, when he heard Mr. Brown address his son-in-law as follows: "Have you been to the exhibition this year, Sir Reginald?"

Then Walter knew that it was coming; that the subject which had been so happily avoided up to that moment was about to be touched upon; and that he would be called upon to play some deceitful part in the discussion. How he wished that he had pleaded indisposition, or work to do at home—an excuse which his conscientious host would readily have admitted—and taken himself off immediately after dinner! But it was too late now.

"Well, the fact is, Mr. Brown," returned the captain, in a low voice, "that, until the day before yesterday, when your generosity placed us upon quite another footing, dear Lotty and myself had not much money to spare for exhibitions, nor, indeed, for anything else."

It was plain that the old merchant was pleased by this confession, or perhaps by the deferential and almost humble tone in which it was couched, for his manner altered at once from studied carelessness to a certain confidential assurance as he rejoined: "Well, well, all that is over now; let bygones be bygones. Of course, I cannot forget what has happened. I should be very culpable not to make a difference—and a great difference—between the daughter who has disobeved me, who has been undutiful, and her with whom I have had no cause to be displeased. But still I shall take care that Lady Selwyn shall possess an income for the future sufficient, with economy, to maintain her rank."

"You are most kind, sir; much kinder than the—that is, than I have deserved of you," returned the other. His words were those of gratitude, and to his father-in-law they doubtless seemed to express it; but to Walter's more sensitive ears, who also knew the captain well, the tone in which they were spoken had both dislike and disappointment in it. He knew it must have been galling to such a man as Selwyn to have

to humble himself to one like Mr. Brown, and it also struck him that the mention of a difference—'and a great difference'—to be made between the daughters, had annoyed the captain excessively. He would have avoided playing the eavesdropper had it been possible, but their conversation had taken him utterly by surprise, and was now already concluded. The next words were addressed by Mr. Brown to Walter himself.

"Our friend, Sir Reginald, has been telling me, Mr. Litton, that he has not been to the exhibition this year, so that he does not know what a treat is in store for him in your Philippa. 'Supplication,' by-the-bye, you call it, I believe; but that is no matter, for Sir Reginald will have a name of his own for it."

"Indeed!" said the captain, with the most innocent air that his bold eyes and fierce moustaches would permit. "How should that be?"

"Well, you must go and judge for yourself; but it seems to me, and to Lilian also, the most wonderful likeness—considering that it was quite undesigned—cf Lotty herself." "Dear me, how curious!" said the captain, raising his eyebrows. "What does Mr. Litton call it? 'Supplication?' I will make a note of that;" and he took out a dainty case of ivory tablets and entered the memorandum accordingly.

Walter felt hot and uncomfortable; he did not envy Selwyn his sang-froid, and yet he would have given anything to possess it. He was wroth with him, too, that he had not taken some course more likely to cut the conversation short; as it was, it was evident that the offensive topic was only just begun.

"Yes; it is in the third room of the Academy, in the left-hand corner as you enter," continued the old man eagerly. "You should go to-morrow, and see it. What is so surprising is, that Mr. Litton never set eyes on Lotty before to-night."

A dreadful silence seemed to fill the room as Mr. Brown said this. The two girls sat with their cheeks burning, and their eyes fixed upon the floor. Perhaps they felt like Walter—as though the floor had suddenly opened, and that one false step would precipitate him, and Lotty with

him, to utter destruction. Shame covered his face, and palsied his tongue.

"Well, I can answer for it, at all events, that my wife didn't sit for the portrait," observed the captain, with a light laugh. "We have been rather hard up; but Lady Selwyn never went out as a model, to my knowledge."

"I should hope not," observed the matterof-fact merchant austerely. "I don't wish to say anything against any calling by which poor folks get an honest living, but I am afraid the models of painters are not generally models of propriety."

"Hollo! do you hear that, Mr. Litton," said the captain gaily. "Come, draw and defend yourself. Was not your Philippa, Edward's queen, then, all that it seems you have represented her on canvas?—tenderhearted, pitiful, regal, modest, and all the rest of it?"

Walter had felt grateful to his quondam friend for the moment, for picking him out from that hole in the floor, but this impudent allusion to Nellie Neale was altogether too much for his patience.

"The model that sat for Philippa is as

honest and good a girl as any I know," said he, in a stern voice; "though it is quite true that persons in her position are thrown much in the way of temptation, and —of scoundrels."

Such an angry blush leapt to the captain's cheek, as told not only of guilt, but also of consciousness that the other knew him to be guilty; yet his answer was careless enough, as he replied: "That is a pretty confession as respects you gentlemen-artists, Mr. Litton; for my part, I thought it had become generally understood that there were no gay Lotharios now, except in the army."

The presence of mind and quickness that the captain exhibited had been certainly far beyond what Walter (though he had always known him to be a clever fellow in his way) had believed him to possess; and he now began to credit him with other qualities, the existence of which he had never suspected in him, and which, perhaps, he had no reason to suspect. It seemed to him that there was a design in all Selwyn said; that even in that general remark, for example, respecting the gallantry of the

military profession, he was either making light of his own behaviour to Nellie Neale, or, what was more likely, was paving the way for excuses with the old merchant, in case the matter should ever be brought up against him. If this was so, Mr. Brown, of course, was quite unconscious of it.

"Well, well," said he, "let Mr. Litton's original be who she may, he has made a most charming picture of her, of which I am glad to say I am the possessor. Indeed, it is so good, and also, as I have said, so like dear Lotty, that I have commissioned him to paint me a companion portrait of her sister. It is only just begun—that is, so far as Lilian is concerned—but I already recognise the likeness."

This was said as though he was conferring the highest praise upon Litton's picture which such a work of art could receive; whereas, as all of us who are duly subject to authority in such matters are aware, likeness in such a case is a very secondary affair, if only "tone," and "pose," and "meaning," and a number of other æsthetic excellences, have been attained. A father, however, and especially a patron, may be excused for these little errors; and Walter bowed his acknowledgments, as gracefully as though Mr. Brown had said: "Your ideal has been realized."

"Then Miss Lilian is Mr. Litton's model for the present, is she?" inquired the captain, smiling.

"Well, of course, she does not go to his studio, Sir Reginald; our friend here is so good as to come here, and work."

"Oh, indeed!" returned Selwyn, raising his eyebrows; "that must be a very pleasant arrangement for him."

There was such a marked significance in his tone, that even the old merchant understood the innuendo it was intended to convey, and answered with some stiffness: "I hope so; we do all that we can to make it pleasant, though I am aware that we are putting Mr. Litton to considerable inconvenience."

But notwithstanding the friendship these words implied towards the young painter, the eyes of the speaker wandered to Lilian with an expression of anxiety, if not of alarm; and from that moment Walter felt cenvinced that Selwyn had declared war against him, nay, more, that he had come that evening with the express determination to declare it. There were immense odds in the captain's favour; not only from his position in the family, which might now be said to be established, but because, as he had himself observed, "all was fair in war," in his view of the matter; whereas, as he well knew, Litton was scrupulous even to chivalry. It was a contest between arms of precision and bows and arrows, which could have but one result.

Walter did not, however, deign to take notice of the other's hostility, even by a look (and, indeed, the captain had studiously kept his face averted from him during the last five minutes), but turned to Lotty with some commonplace observation, to which she confusedly replied. No person, however unobservant, could have failed to see that something had gone wrong, and yet it seemed to Walter that her embarrassment, as she answered him, was due to other causes than that knowledge. She had shot a nervous, frightened glance towards her husband, and her words had been very cold.

Could it be possible that he had schooled her to refuse him her countenance, bidden her not only to ignore, but to forget that he had been and still was her friend? Or was she so conscious of her own wretchedness as to feel she had no cause to thank him for the hand he had had in giving her a husband—who was also a tyrant?

"I have some work to do at home, Miss Lilian, which your father's hospitality has caused me to neglect," said Walter abruptly, and with a touch of bitterness that he could not wholly stifle. "I must go now;" and he held out his hand to her.

"But you will come to-morrow at the usual time?" said she, in her clear sweet tones, made more distinct, as he fancied, even than usual, so that all in the room could hear her. "My sister is very desirous to see you paint—are you not, Lotty?—and she is coming on purpose."

"I don't know," said Lotty hesitating; "I should like it;" and again her eyes wandered towards her lord and master.

"Oh yes, you must come early," put in Mr. Brown authoritatively, "and spend the day; and Sir Reginald can join us when he

likes. Well, if you must go, Mr. Litton, you must; this is Liberty Hall, you know." And Walter took his leave, exchanging only a nod with Selwyn.

.As he walked home with a cigar in his mouth, his anger was still hot against the captain; but he could reflect upon what had happened with more patience than when he had been standing "under fire" as it were, in the drawing-room; and as usual with him, however angry, when time for thought was given him, he began to beat about in his own mind for excuses for the offender. If Selwyn really believed him to be capable of telling what he knew about Nellie, it was perhaps natural, though certainly not right, that he should look upon him as his enemy. But could Reginald, after so many years of friendship, believe his friend so base? Might there not be some other reason that made him hostile to him? Might he not for example resent his having drawn that likeness of Lotty, notwithstanding that the result had been so favourable to his fortunes? Selwyn must surely know him too well to suspect him of entertaining any improper ideas with respect to his friend's wife; and, moreover, the captain was by no means a jealous man; he was too self-confident (and with reason) to be subject to any such passion. But the Somebody—and there was a possible Somebody in the person of Mrs. Sheldon—might have put the notion into his head. By itself he would doubtless have laughed at it; but coupled with the picture, was it not just within the range of possibility, that it had made Selwyn jealous?

Nothing could be more unreasonable or more unjust than for him to be so, but if he was, his conduct became to a certain degree But, on the other hand, was excusable. such an explanation of his behaviour consistent with that significant remark of his, that the "arrangement" of painting Lilian's picture at Willowbank must be "very pleasant for Mr. Litton?" It was so pleasant that Walter confessed to himself that if it should be broken off the greatest happiness of his life would thereby be taken away from him; and he had a sorrowful prescience that it would be taken away, and that at no distant date.



CHAPTER II.

A CONFIDENTIAL SITTING.

OTWITHSTANDING the dismal foreboding that haunted Walter Litton as respected his connexion with Willowbank, it is not to be supposed that he was even yet in love with Lilian, in any serious or practical way. If he had been charged with such an imprudence he would probably have answered: "And am I also in love with the moon?" but there would have been more bitterness than drollery in the reply. We remember a young gentleman of our own acquaintance who was rallied upon his attachment to a lady considerably his senior, and who gave considerable comfort to his friends by replying gaily, "A man may not marry his grandmother;" and yet he did wed the lady after VOL. II.

But the "table of affinity" was nothing all. in the way of an impediment compared with the obstacles that stood between Walter and Lilian. He had not even told his love, though that is of small consequence, since love is one of those things which "goes"and also comes—" without saying." He had never dreamt of telling it. He would have thought it dishonourable-considering how he had obtained admittance to Willowbank and his hospitable reception there-to speak to Lilian upon such a subject without first addressing himself to her father; and if he did that it was certain that he would be dismissed at once. Dismissal indeed, as we have said, would probably take place at all events; but he had no intention of anticipating it. Whatever peril to himself, whatever regrets, whatever despair might attend such a course, he resolved to be with Lilian as much as he could. His wings might be singed, he might be utterly shrivelled up by that attractive flame, but the light and the warmth were temptations that he could not withstand, and he would enjoy them as long as possible. And at the appointed hour next morning he presented himself at Willowbank, and was shown up to the extemporized studio abovestairs.

Both the sisters were awaiting him there, and received him with marked cordiality. In the morning light Lotty looked even more wan and changed than she had done on the previous evening; but her manner was warm and genial, as though she was striving to make up to him for the enforced coldness of her late reception.

"It gave me pain, Mr. Litton, yesterday, to have to ignore so true and kind a friend as you have shown yourself," said she frankly. "And you must please to believe that I am not the ingrate that I seemed."

"You seemed nothing of the kind, dear Lady Selwyn," answered Walter; "but only to be the victim of untoward circumstances, as indeed we all were. I hope the time will soon arrive when there will be no necessity for such concealment."

"Well, I think it will be better to let bygones be bygones altogether," replied she quickly. "I know what you will say—for Reginald has thought a great deal about it —that it is unpleasant to feel that there is always a risk; that when we are most secure and all is going on smoothly, an explosion may occur out of this very secret; but that is no reason why we should light the match ourselves. Moreover, the longer it is delayed, the better condition we shall be in to meet the consequences. At present, things have hardly joined, as it were; whereas, in a little time, I hope the reunion will have been fully established—and solid masonry will stand almost any shock."

"Your husband is doubtless the best judge of his own affairs," said Walter quietly. "It seemed to me that he and your father got on capitally last night."

"Yes, did they not? And dear papa is so very kind to me. He hardly likes me to be out of his sight; and I should have been with him now, but that I could not bear to meet you a second time as a stranger, Mr. Litton.—O Lilian, he was so kind on that journey to Penaddon! What we should have done without him, I can't imagine! And he has been even kinder since——"

She stopped, and blushed; and Walter coloured too at this allusion to his loan. He was not, however, so annoyed at it, as he

otherwise would have been, since the fact of Selwyn's having told his wife of the matter seemed to render it impossible that he should have entertained any jealousy of him with respect to her. He might have been jealous, and still borrowed the money—that would have been like "spoiling the Philistines," in the captain's eyes—but he would certainly not have let her know with whom he had incurred the obligation.

I know he has been kind," assented Lilian, "and is so still, since, for your sakes, he is doing violence to his own conscience."

Walter could not help comparing the difference in the view of these two girls as respected that matter of secrecy: the one had spoken of it as a dangerous risk, and solely with regard to the material loss that might result from it; the other had referred to its moral aspect. It was true that Lilian had recommended the dissimulation, but she had made no attempt to justify it; whereas it had not even struck her sister that there was any objection—on the score of conscience—to the plan at all. But in this he was hard on Lotty, since it ought to

have been evident to him that she was but the mouthpiece of her husband.

"O yes, that's very dreadful, of course," said she; "but it would be a hundred times worse, if papa found out you were an old friend of ours, Mr. Litton, and had been planning and plotting in our favour."

"Nay, he could scarcely say that, Lady Selwyn, for, with all the will in the world to serve you, I had no such opportunities. The picture, you know, was a lucky chance."

"Yes; how funny, was it not? I must certainly go and see that picture some day; as soon as I have got something fit to wear to go in. And that reminds me I have not written out what dear papa calls a 'rough draft' of the things I am in want of. These are to be quite independent of his arrangement with Reginald—a little present all to myself. Is he not kind, Mr. Litton?"

And off she tripped, with more of the lightness of those Penaddon days than he had hitherto seen in her. He was not pleased at the careless way in which she had spoken of his picture (how little did she guess what it had cost him; how little did she dream that it had been inspired by the

memory of herself, and had been wrought out mid vain repinings!); but to see her so like herself, made him forget that, and follow her retreating figure with tender eyes.

"I suppose," said he smiling, "your father thinks he can scarcely do enough to show how pleased he is to get your sister back, Miss Lilian."

"That is but natural," answered Lilian gravely. "But there is another reason, I think, for his being so demonstrative: she looks so piteous—so sad. You see that, Mr. Litton, yourself, I'm sure."

"She is certainly not looking nearly so well as before her marriage," answered Walter.

"No; and what is worse, not nearly so happy, Mr. Litton."

"And yet she ought to be happy, Miss Lilian, being thus reconciled to her father, and reunited to yourself. Perhaps it is the excess of joy which, succeeding to much sorrow, has been too much for her."

Lilian shook her head, though Walter was at that moment painting from it, and she was generally a most careful sitter. "No, no; you are quite wrong there;

though as you say, there has been much sorrow. Sir Reginald is your friend, Mr. Litton—though (if I am not mistaken) not quite so friend-like as he used to be—and therefore I cannot tell you what I think."

"Pray tell me, Miss Lilian. It cannot hurt Sir Reginald to tell me, and it will not hurt me. My solicitude is not for him, but for your sister. That is not because he was, as you hint, unfriendly to me last night; it always was so. I could not have painted that picture, had it been otherwise."

"I guessed that much," said Lilian

softly.

"Yes; of course she could be nothing to me, for I never met her till the day she" he looked about for some euphonious term in vain—"ran away with Captain Selwyn; but her face haunted me from the moment I first saw it."

"It is sadly changed," said Lilian, in low grave tones. "Do you think six months of wedded happiness could have altered it so? No; nor even six months of poverty, or toil, or care. Nothing but misery could have effected that, Mr. Litton. My poor dear

darling sister Lotty is a miserable woman."

"Let us hope not that," said Litton soothingly. "She has been living a rough life of late, remember, compared with that to which she was accustomed under your father's roof; she has had anxieties of the gravest sort, as well as petty cares, which of themselves would affect so delicate a being."

"Yes; and she has had no one to comfort her. That man, Sir Reginald, is no comfort to her. She is afraid of him. Did you not see how her eyes followed him about—not with affection, or at least, certainly not with affection only, but in fear. He is a hard man, I am sure, Mr. Litton, and I believe he is a bad man."

"As I told you once before, Miss Lilian, no man is good if weighed in so fine a balance as a young lady's judgment—unless he chance to be her husband. Selwyn is doubtless selfish, like the rest of our sex; and he is a proud man: no doubt, therefore, he resented your father's conduct towards him, implying as it did that this marriage was in some respects a mésalliance; and

resentment does make a fellow a little hard."

"But he should not have resented my father's conduct upon Lotty," urged Lilian; "no man but a coward——"

"Selwyn is not a coward," interrupted Walter. He could not afford to neglect that chance of defending the captain on grounds where he had good standing; yet the next moment he felt that it would have been better to have let it pass.

"I don't mean that your friend is afraid of swords and bullets, Mr. Litton," answered Lilian quickly. "We are all aware of that; but there are other kinds of cowardice—and worse—than that which shrinks from death and danger. I know that his arm was hurt in battle; but if he had lost it, his empty sleeve would not—to me at least—have atoned for his want of heart. He has no heart, to be called such; nor courage either, or he would not have permitted you-his friend—to play the hypocrite for him. It's true that I did myself urge you to do so; but had I been he, I would have told my father all last night, and excused you to him for what you had done for him and his; instead of which, he made a cat's paw of you, Mr. Litton, and showed himself neither grateful to you nor friendly."

Walter felt that this was true: her statement of it, indeed, was the strongest possible confirmation of his own view of the matter; but it was a subject that he by no means wished to discuss.

"I am sorry that your sister's husband should have made such an unfavourable impression upon you, Miss Lilian; I am sure that he little suspects it."

"It is no matter to him whether he suspects it or not; so long as he has gained my father's ear, that is all he cares for. My opinion of him is of no consequence in any way, nor his of me; it is upon my sister's account alone that I am so grieved—so wretched. Of course, I have not told her a word of this; nor my father either. I had no right to tell it to you—that is, to trouble you with such a matter—but I felt as though I could not keep it myself."

"If it has been any comfort to you to tell it to me, then I am glad that it has been told," said Walter gravely. "I both think and hope, however, that your affection for your sister leads you to exaggerate her woes. In a little time, now that Fortune smiles upon her, you will see her become herself again, and her husband will be reinstated in your good opinion. Adversity is not a good school for all of us, believe me; and in happier days, you will see Sir Reginald's character in brighter colours."

"Let us hope so," said Lilian sighing. "I shall have every opportunity for doing it, since my father intends to ask him to live with us. To have dear Lotty here again will be an inexpressible pleasure to me—a few days ago I should have deemed it the greatest that could befall me; but, on the other hand, to see her the slave of a tyrant, spiritless, joyless, with all her illusions cruelly destroyed—that will go nigh to break my heart."

Walter saw that his companion was in no mood to be reasoned with. It was probable that she had some distinct foundation for her apprehensions or convictions, which she did not wish to disclose; but if even they arose from intuition, it was difficult for him to combat opinions which in truth he shared. It was terribly early for her to have thus made up her mind as to the character of the man just admitted into her family circle; but upon the whole it seemed better to let matters right themselves-if that might be-than to argue the subject further. He worked on, therefore, in silence. only now and then addressing his companion upon professional topics. heroine's head should be a little more to the right, please"-" Would you be so good as to smile, Joan, since you are not yet condemned to be burnt alive? those gloomy looks are an anachronism;" &c. &c. Then Mr. Brown came in with Lotty leaning on his arm, and was very gracious, though to Walter's sensitive ear, his tone lacked its usual frankness. His looks had changed for the better almost as much as those of of his new-found daughter had changed for the worse. As he stood complacently regarding the picture, his hand beat softly upon hers, as though to convince himself that his happiness was not a dream, that he had really recovered the treasure which he had deemed lost for ever. Was it the mere recollection of that loss, or the hint that Sir Reginald had dropped the previous night,

which made him, while praising the painter's handiwork, more distant to the painter himself? "You are getting on capitally, Mr. Litton. I conclude that, after a few more sittings, my daughter's presence will not be necessary to you?" Lilian looked up, as if about to speak, but did not do so. Walter felt that she had intended to say that the sittings gave her no inconvenience; in his secret heart, he flattered himself that she enjoyed them.

"I shall not trouble her more than I can

help," said he.

"Just so," returned his host; "and, of course, it will be more convenient for yourself to finish the work at home. I must take these young ladies one of these days to see your studio."

"It is but a poor place," said Walter; and you must please to give me notice, that I may have it swept and garnished."

"Yes, yes; we understand all that," answered Mr. Brown loftily. "It is not to be expected that lodgings in Beech Street should be in such a spick-and-span condition as we keep our rooms at Willow-

bank. We will not take you by surprise, sir."

Presently the dull roar of the gong sounding for luncheon came up to them from the hall.

"I am afraid, Mr. Litton," said the host, "I must take away your patient—I mean your sitter—since I have promised myself the pleasure of driving out with my two daughters after lunch."

"By all means," answered Walter, with a little blush. It was the tone of the speech, rather than the words, that annoyed him; it seemed to say so very plainly: "I can't have you hanging about the house all day, and dropping in at every meal."

"But will not Mr. Litton lunch with us, papa?" said Lotty. It was an effort that evidently cost her much; she was by nature timid; all the vigour and courage of her life seemed to have been expended in that runaway match of hers; and, moreover, it was more than probable that she had received positive orders from her husband that Walter was not to be encouraged at Willowbank.

"We have some Devonshire cream in the

house, Mr. Litton, I know," observed Lilian, "if such things tempt you."

"Nay," answered he, smiling; "I rarely eat lunch at all."

He was resolute not to take offence at Mr. Brown, and his meekness had its reward; for that gentleman, conscious, perhaps, of having committed a breach of hospitality—a virtue on which he plumed himself—began now to press him to stay; and when Litton declined, he said: "Well, well; you must come and dine with us, again then, some day: let us say in a week or so hence—when you have done your Joan of Arc."

The invitation was not a pressing one, and about as vague as those to which no date is attached; and it was a proof how "hard he was hit"—how highly, at all events, he valued an evening spent in Lilian's company—that Walter accepted it with a good grace. At the same time it was quite evident to him, that neither on that occasion nor on any other would he be received at Willowbank on the old easy footing.



CHAPTER III.

SIR REGINALD IS FRANKNESS ITSELF.

ALTER'S Joan of Arc did not make progress at the rate which its beginning seemed to promise;

nor was this through any fault of the artist. He would doubtless have liked to linger over it as long as he dared; he was not given to "scamp" his work at any time, and this particular picture was, if we may say so without any imputation upon that prudence and good sense on which he piqued himself, a labour of love to him. He wished to do his very best with it, in order—at least that was the reason which he would have given for his solicitude in the matter—to make it a fitting companion to the Philippa. But had he been ever so desirous to make good speed, the opportunity was not afforded vol. II.

to him. Instead of repairing to Willowbank daily, according to the original arrangement, he was given to understand that his attendance once a week would now be more convenient; and more than once, upon the day before a visit, he would receive a communication from his patron that Miss Lilian's engagements would not permit her to sit to him until the week afterwards. would perhaps have been more judicious in Mr. Brown if he wished to part these young people, that Walter should have done his work at once-so much of it, that is, as required Lilian's presence—and then have taken it home to finish, as had been at first agreed upon; for as it was, these periods of absence only made the meetings more attractive, and imparted to them a certain flavour of friendship and intimacy born of long acquaintance. Moreover, artist and sitter had so much the more to talk about concerning matters that had occurred in the interval; and since these were naturally of a domestic sort—chiefly respecting Lotty and her husband—their conferences became very confidential.

Sir Reginald and Lady Selwyn were now

living at Willowbank; but the former—for he could not suppose otherwise—kept out of his way designedly; he had not set eyes on him since the date of that dinner of reconciliation, now some months ago. Lotty he often saw, and she was looking somewhat better, certainly less haggard and anxious; whereas Lilian, on the other hand, had fallen off, not perhaps in her beauty, but certainly as to health and spirits. She had been depressed when he first knew her, because of her sister's misfortune; but she had always entertained hopes of its mitigation, and could rouse herself to cheerfulness upon occasion; but now she was always depressed, and at times looked so pale and piteous as to more resemble Philippa than Joan. in answer to Walter's inquiries on the matter, did she affect to conceal the cause of this alteration.

"I told you that if I found that my sister was unhappy in her marriage, it would be a very severe blow to me, Mr. Litton; and that blow has fallen."

It really seemed that, independently of her passionate love for Lotty, their twinship had something sympathetic in it, which rendered their woes common. Walter could now say little to heal this family breach—though he loyally did his best for the captain-since her complaints of Sir Reginald arose from matters that were within her own observation, and of which he knew nothing, save From them he learned that from her lips. the baronet was growing into considerable favour with his father-in-law, and that his position in the house seemed to be quite secured. To his host, he was complaisant, even to servility, and perfectly civil and polite to Lilian herself. At first, he had appeared to lay himself out to gain her sisterly affections; but perceiving that his efforts were but coldly received, he had discontinued them. To his wife, he was smooth-spoken before her two relatives: but Lilian had noticed that his voice in addressing her had quite another tone when he imagined that others were out of hearing; and independently of that, she was persuaded that Lotty lived in fear of him. A hundred little occurrences had convinced her of this, slight in themselves, but all significant, and taken together, overwhelmingly corroborative: the wav poor Lotty watched her husband even in company; the involuntary admissions she would make when speaking of him in his absence; the start she would give on hearing unexpectedly his voice, his footstep; and, above all, the loss of all her brightness and gaiety, and happy ways.

"Look at her, Mr. Litton—only look at her, as she moves, and smiles, and speaks, and then if you will tell me that I am wrong, I will bless you from the bottom of my heart!"

But Walter could not tell her she was wrong; all that he saw of Lotty convinced him that her sister's sad description of her case was but too true: that she, who counting by months could almost be termed a bride, was already a broken-spirited and most unhappy woman. Curiously enough Mr. Brown did not seem to perceive this, or at all events, to take it much to heart; perhaps he imagined that languor and impassiveness were the proper attributes of an exalted position, and that it was only natural that Lady Selwyn should have cast off the childish gaiety that had characterized her as plain Lotty Brown. On the other hand, he was somewhat anxious about Lilian. He saw the change in her, though even in that case only in her health; if he noticed her altered spirits he set that down to some physical ailment; it was inexplicable to him that any girl who had plenty to eat and drink, fine clothes to wear, and a good house over her head, could have any cause for melancholy.

"When your picture is finished, Mr. Litton," he observed on one occasion, "and before the cold weather sets in, I propose to take my little household to Italy. It seems to all of us that my daughter Lilian requires change of scene; and our medical man has recommended a warm climate."

Walter could not but express his hopes that such a plan would benefit the young lady; but he had little expectation of its doing so, since the cause of her malady would remain, or rather, accompany her on her tour, in the person of Sir Reginald. Moreover, the information had been given him with a certain significance of tone, which, at all events to his ear, had seemed to imply another object in the arrangement—namely, that of separating Lilian from himself; and if so, he could make a shrewd

guess as to whom he had to thank for the precaution. He thought this hard, since never by look or word had he broken his inward resolve not to abuse his position at Willowbank, by offering love to his host's daughter; but harder still, that Sir Reginald, whom he had helped to his marriage with Lotty, should have been the person to awaken Mr. Brown's suspicions of him in such a matter. However, there was nothing to be done or even said. It was clearly no business of his, though how nearly it concerned him, his sinking heart and faltering tongue-for when he had first heard the news, he could barely trust himself to speak to Lilian-gave evidence. If Mr. Christopher Brown had chosen to take his family to Nova Zembla, it was not for him to make objections. And after all, such a proceeding, or something like it, that is, some arrangement which should forbid his meeting Lilian more, was what he had expected ever since that fatal dinner-party. It would have been as easy to separate her from him-dutiful daughter as she was-by a word of paternal authority as by removing her a thousand miles away. He felt that every touch of his brush upon the picture now hastened the time that was to part him from Lilian for ever; and yet he did not linger over his task on that account: he finished it as quickly as he could, consistent with his doing it as well as he could; and then he told Mr. Brown that the rest could be completed at his own house; that it was no longer requisite for him to have his daughter before him. Perhaps Mr. Brown had expected some procrastination upon Walter's part; perhaps the quiet manner and matterof-fact tone of the speaker for the moment disarmed his suspicions, and gave him a twinge of conscience for having entertained them; but at all events, his behaviour upon receiving this information was more genial and conciliatory than it had been for months.

"Your picture has, I assure you, given us all great satisfaction. We had promised ourselves long ago the pleasure of seeing you at dinner when it should be completely finished. I intended it to be quite a celebration banquet—to have asked some influential friends, patrons of art, who might have been useful to you in your profession;

but circumstances have rendered that impossible. Before your Joan can be fit for such an ordeal, we must be off to Italy. The Philippa"—he always called it by that name, its proper title of "Supplication" being distasteful to him—"will be home from the Academy next Tuesday. Dine with us then upon that day, and come as early as you like. It will probably be many months, perhaps longer, before we shall have the pleasure of seeing you again."

It was evident to Walter that Mr. Christopher Brown wished that they should part good friends—but above all, that they should part—and on the ensuing Tuesday; for, since his picture was finished, there would be no excuse for the young painter's presenting himself at Willowbank after that date: and that the "Celebration dinner." as his host called it, would in fact be a farewell one. The thought of this struck a chill to his heart, and made the future blank indeed. Curiously enough, however, although despairing, he was not despondent. He was resolute to go through with his farewell entertainment—that would, he knew, be like the apples of the Dead Sea in his

mouth—with a smiling countenance; to all outward seeming he would bear himself bravely-not for Lilian's sake, for he did not venture to flatter himself that she would feel as he did—but for his own, so that at least he should not incur ridicule. More than one pair of eyes would probably regard him narrowly, but they should not learn from his own looks or lips that he was sad. As he had been asked to "come as early as he liked," he would do so. He understood, or chose to understand, that by that form of speech Mr. Brown intended him to spend the afternoon at Willowbank. He did not expect that his host would be there to meet him, and much less the captain; but in this he was mistaken.

Mr. Brown indeed, he found on his arrival, had not yet returned from the City; but Sir Reginald—for whom he had not asked—the servant said, was somewhere about the grounds. "The young ladies," added she, as Walter hesitated whether to join the captain or not, "are gone out shopping."

It was evident he was not expected so soon; indeed, it seemed quite possible that

Mr. Brown had forgotten he had invited him to come early.

"Shall I tell Sir Reginald that you are here, sir?"

"No, thank you; I will go and find him myself," said Walter after a pause. It had now struck him that the whole affair was planned; that the young ladies had been sent out, and that the captain was, contrary to his custom, staying at home expressly to speak with him alone. If that was so, and he found him as unfriendly towards him as he expected, he would tell him some In this not very conciliatory plain truths. frame of mind he walked quickly on to the lawn; and on the path that fringed it, he saw Sir Reginald with a cigar in his mouth looking at the ducks, or the nursemaids beyond them, with much apparent interest.

"Hollo! Litton, what brings you here?" said he carelessly, as he held out his hand.

"Well, an invitation from your father-inlaw, which it seems he has forgotten."

"Oh, I see; you have your polished boots on. But we don't dine at Willowbank now at the old heathenish hours: the place—and I may add its proprietor—has

become more civilized. This is an hour when only the wild beasts are fed. Hark at them!"

And indeed from the Zoological Gardens across the Park there came that multitudinous roar, which is the lions' grace before meat.

"I was asked to come early and spend the afternoon, Captain Selwyn," replied Walter haughtily.

"Why captain?" said the other laughing. "You needn't be in a huff, my good fellow; and besides, I am not a captain."

"I beg your pardon; I should have said Sir Reginald."

"That's rubbish, Litton. I'm not a fool like my father-in-law to lay such store by my handle. I mean that I have sold out, and am therefore no more a captain than you are."

"I didn't know for certain you had sold out," said Walter. "How should-I? You have not been very communicative to me of late, about that or anything else."

"Well—frankly—Litton, I thought it better that I should not be. I don't want to quarrel with you, Heaven knows; but it seemed necessary to let you know that your conduct, in one respect at least, was not such as Lady Selwyn and myself could quite approve."

"Put your wife out of the question, if you please, as I am sure, if she had a voice in the matter she would wish to be put; and be so good as to tell me in what I have given offence to you, sir."

"Well, there is no offence exactly—certainly not so much as your last words were intended to convey. But you have, as it seems to me, adopted a line of proceeding that is not only distasteful to me, but prejudicial to my interests. Of course I may be mistaken; I should be glad to think I was so, and that the good understanding that has always existed between us has been needlessly disturbed——"

"Never mind the good understanding," interposed Walter drily; "stick to the facts, if you have got any."

"Well, I think I have," answered Sir Reginald coolly. "To be brief, my good fellow, have you not been making love to my sister-in-law, Lilian?"

"I deny altogether your right to put to

me any such question: to be plain with you, indeed, I think it a great impertinence."

"Possibly," said the captain, taking up a small flat stone and making a "dick, duck, drake" with it on the water; "we must agree to differ upon that point. I am simply referring to the fact that you have made love to her."

"I have done nothing of the kind. I swear it! I have breathed no word of love to Miss Lilian Brown."

"Very good; I am glad to hear it. But there are other ways of inspiring affection in a young woman besides breathing it. A good deal may be done by looking at her, for example, and even by a peculiar pressure of the fingers; I remember all that, you know, though I am getting such a respectable old married man."

"I have no doubt you remember," said Walter, thinking of poor Nellie Neale. This man's cool impudence was almost more than he could bear, and would have stung most men into making reprisals; yet he already regretted the significance of the tone in which he had spoken those few harmless

words, lest the other should take it for a menace, and imagine perhaps that he wished to make a bargain—terms. Sir Reginald, however, only smiled, though it must be confessed, not in a very pleasant way.

"Well, you may have squeezed her hand or not; that matters nothing: the point is, that you certainly intended—and intend—to squeeze it some day. If you have not declared your love, you are in love with her. Come, is it not so?"

"Well, and what if it is?" returned Walter indignantly. "I don't say that it is so; but I say, what of it? and especially—in my case—what is it to you?"

"I will answer you in every particular, my good fellow; but first let us finish with the fact itself. The case is, that you obtain admittance into the house of a very rich man, on pretence—don't be offended, let us say on the ground, then—on the ground of painting his daughter's picture; and during the progress of that work of art, that you allow yourself to entertain sentiments for her that are a little more than æsthetic. I don't accuse you, mind, as any other man would, who is less acquainted with your

character—as her own father, for example, would without doubt accuse you, if he was as certain of what has occurred as I am—of fortune-hunting: I am content to believe that you have fallen a victim to her charms, and not her purse: but, as a matter of fact, she is very rich, and you are very poor, and the knowledge of that circumstance, it may be reasonably urged, should have caused you to place a greater restraint upon your inclination."

"I see," said Walter coldly; "I should have taken example from one Captain Selwyn."

"That is beside the question, my good fellow; or, rather, it opens up the second part of it, which, as I have said, I am also quite prepared to discuss with you. It is true that I was as penniless as yourself when I made love to Lilian's sister; but then it was not as a guest of her father's, or under any false pretence, such as that of taking her portrait. And, moreover, since you insist upon making the matter a personal one—you must allow me to remind you that it was through me—or mine, which is the same thing, that you obtained admittance to

this house at all. It is surely not necessary to go into that part of the business."

"It is not at all necessary," answered Walter contemptuously. If Sir Reginald had expressed annoyance at his having painted "Supplication" from the recollection of his bride, he would have admitted that such a feeling was natural, and humbled himself as one in some degree to blame; but that Selwyn should have alluded to the matter thus carelessly, as a lucky accident, while at the same time he took credit to himself for the very secondary advantage it had conferred on Walter, irritated the latter exceedingly.

"It is not at all necessary, Sir Reginald; and I quite understand—taking, for argument's sake, your charge against me for granted—the difference that would exist in our respective cases as suitors. But what I do not understand is this unexpected zeal on your part in the interests of property. I have heard you express sentiments with respect to love-making so widely different, and especially how odious it was that money should mate with money, that I can scarcely believe my ears."

"My general sentiments," answered the other coolly, "are much the same as they were; but circumstances have altered them as respects this particular case. The fountain of all sentiments, as the motive of all actions, is, I suppose, with most of us, self-interest; and it is clearly to my interest that you should not marry my wife's sister."

"Upon my word you are very frank, Sir Reginald."

"My good fellow, I am as open as the day," answered the other coolly. don't suppose that I object to you as a brother-in-law more than to anybody else? I am not, believe me, so ungrateful. On the contrary, if you were a rich man, and if Lilian must needs marry somebody, I should say: 'Take Litton.' But it is not to my advantage that she should marry anybody, and least of all a poor man. When I won my wife, she was destined to be her father's co-heiress; but as I have good reason to know he has altered his intentions in that respect, and left the bulk of his property to her sister, it is therefore only by good management that it can now be retained in the family."

"So you mean, if possible, to keep Lilian unmarried all her life, for your own advantage?"

"Most decidedly I do." replied Sir Reginald. "Not that I have the least objection to her entering into the holy state of matrimony per se, nor even to her choosing yourself for her husband. You might run away with her to-morrow if I could feel quite sure that old Christopher would not forgive you. But our self-made friend yonder"and the speaker jerked his thumb towards the house in a highly disrespectful manner-"is not the Brutus that he imagines himself to be; and he has already a sneaking likeness for yourself, a compliment he is very welcome to pay you, but not at my expense. To conclude, my good friend, I may tell vou, without flattery, that you are a dangerous fellow, and that I mean to guard against you and your attractions as best I can."

"It seems to me, Selwyn," said Walter gravely, "that you are the most selfish man I have ever known, and also the most shameless."

"Selfish, I doubtless am," replied Sir Reginald smiling; "it is rather a common weakness with us men; and since by shameless you mean honest, I will not defend myself against that charge either; you should take it rather as a compliment to your good sense that I have been so plain-spoken with you. I have exactly explained our mutual position; and now it remains entirely with yourself as to whether our interests are henceforth to be antagonistic, or the reverse; in other words, whether we shall be friends or enemies."

"You have, as it seems to me, settled that matter your own way already," answered Walter grimly.

"Not at all, my good fellow. I was obliged to take precautions against you, lest you should obtain such a footing in this house as would enable you to make your own terms, or even dictate them to me; but I have no personal hostility to you whatever. Moreover, I have so great a confidence in your honour, that I am prepared to accept your promise, where I would certainly not take the word of another man."

"And what promise is it you require of me?"

"That you will never, either to-day or hereafter, pay the attentions of a lover to my sister-in-law, or become under any circumstances her husband. If you refuse to give your word to this effect, it will be my painful duty to represent to Mr. Brown the pretensions you entertain to his daughter's hand; and also to take other measures—perhaps at once—the effect of which will render your paying a visit to Willowbank after to-day highly improbable."

"You are not only very 'honest,' as you choose to term it, Sir Reginald," answered Walter, for the first time using a tone of menace, "but it also strikes me somewhat audacious."

"Very likely. I grasp my nettle tightly; that is always my plan in these emergencies. Of course I am well aware that you may do me some harm; though, on the whole, I do not think you will. You can no doubt make some damaging statements; one in particular, which, if you choose to make use of it, will give great pain to Lady Selwyn."

"You need not be afraid of that, sir," answered Walter scornfully.

"I am glad to hear it. At the same

time, do not imagine that all the magnanimity is on your own side. It would not be pleasant to some husbands to know that their own familiar friend had carried away with him in his memory—out of Platonic affection, no doubt—such a portrait of his bride that he could paint from it as from the original."

"For shame, Selwyn!" cried Walter; "your respect for your wife herself should forbid you to speak so."

"Oh, I know you meant no harm," answered the other quickly. "If I had thought otherwise, I would have shot you six months ago, when—" His speech was rapid, and for the first time passionate; but he stopped himself with a powerful effort, then added almost carelessly: "But let us keep our train of argument to the main line. I have asked you a plain question; give me a plain reply. Will you promise—"

"I will promise nothing, nothing," broke in Walter hotly, "with respect to my behaviour to your sister-in-law. I admit no man's right to ask me for such a promise, and your right least of all." "That will do, my good fellow; we now perfectly understand one another; only pray don't look as if you wanted to cut my throat, because here are the ladies."

And indeed at that moment the two sisters were bowing to them from the open carriage, as they were driven up to the front door; they alighted at once, and came towards them down the lawn.

"Mind, Litton," added Sir Reginald in a low but menacing voice, "whatever happens this evening, you have no one to blame for it but yourself."

But before Walter could reply the ladies were within earshot, and Lilian was already holding out her hand.





CHAPTER IV.

THE NEW BRIDGE.

T was a habit of Walter's—no doubt induced by the practice of his profession—to note the countenance of his fellow-creatures narrowly, and it struck him that that of Lilian, as she greeted him upon the lawn at Willowbank, wore a look that he had not seen upon it before. Her eyes were always earnest, and her voice soft and natural, never breaking into those little screams of pretended ador emotion which fashionable miration young ladies use; but upon this occasion her glance was sunnier and more encouraging than he had ever seen it, while her tone of welcome had a certain demonstrativeness about it, such as, had they been alone, would have filled him with wild hopes, but which, since there were spectators, he concluded meant defiance. "However you, Sir Reginald, may choose to treat Mr. Litton," it seemed to say, "it is my intention to show that I am glad to see him." Lotty too, instead of the smile with which she was wont to greet him when she and her sister were alone together, looked grave and timid; which he set down to the same cause—namely, the presence of her husband.

"I feel that I ought to apologize," said Walter, "for such an early visitation; but it seems to me there has been a little mistake. Mr. Brown was so good as to tell me to come early—to spend the afternoon, as I understood him."

"Then how very rude you must have thought us, Mr. Litton!" exclaimed Lilian. "Neither Lotty nor I was ever told a word of that. It is so unlike papa to be so forgetful."

"I am afraid it is I that am the sinner," observed Sir Reginald penitently. "Your father did tell me this morning, Lilian, that Litton would probably drop in soon after luncheon; but I knew that Lotty had some

serious shopping to do, in which she would require your assistance (bonnets, my dear fellow, which with my wife are paramount), and so I kept at home myself—a very bad substitute, I allow—to do the honours in your stead. My conscience smote me, I promise you, when I saw him in his white tie and polished boots (like a fellow who has been up all night at a ball)—there is something so exquisitely ridiculous in a man in evening clothes in the daytime—and reflected that he had got himself up so early all for nothing, or at least only for me; but I really did it for the sake of you ladies."

"I beg you will leave me out of the question, Reginald," said Lilian coldly; "if my father himself had so behaved, it would have been an act of inhospitality; but in your case it was a rudeness, not only to Mr. Litton, but to me."

"I really cannot admit that, Lilian."

"Then we must agree to differ upon that point—at all events, I hope you have done your best, in your self-assumed character of master of the house, to show Mr. Litton the lions."

"He has heard them," said Sir Reginald,

laughing. His temper, which, as Walter was well aware, was none of the best, seemed imperturbable, and only by a red spot on each cheek could you perceive that his sister-in-law's reproof had stung him. "He came at three o'clock, you know, as though he had been asked to dine with them."

"Reggie is incorrigible, Lilian," said Lady Selwyn, forcing a little laugh, "and it's no use being angry with him. After all, my dear, remember Mr. Litton and my husband are old friends, and I daresay have got on very well without us."

"Have you seen our new bridge, Mr. Litton?" inquired Lilian, without taking any notice of this attempt at mediation.

"No," said Walter. "What bridge?"

"Why, the one papa has thrown over the little brook by the rose-garden. But you have been shown nothing, of course?"

"There's ingratitude!" exclaimed Sir Reginald. "Why, I left you to exhibit it to him designedly. I knew he would have to see it——"

But Lilian was already leading the way to this new wonder, with Walter by her side, leaving Sir Reginald and his wife to follow them or not as they, or rather he, might feel inclined.

"It is positively disgraceful," muttered the baronet, "to see how your sister is throwing herself at that fellow's head."

"Let us hope not that, dear," answered

Lotty mildly.

"What's the good of hoping when she's doing it, stupid!" returned he angrily. It had begun to strike him that the somewhat high-handed course he had taken to prevent the young people spending the afternoon in each other's company had not had quite the result he had intended, but indeed rather the contrary one—their heads were very close together, and by their eager talk they seemed to be making up for lost time.

"Had we not better go to the bridge too?"

said Lotty timidly.

"No—yes; that is, you had better go," was the curt reply. "As for me, I can't trust myself to see the girl making such a fool of herself; though this is the last day, thank goodness, that she will have the opportunity of doing it. Follow them up at once, and mind you keep your eyes open and your ears too." And Sir Reginald turned

upon his heel, and lighting a cigar strolled away towards the entrance gate.

In the meantime Lilian's tongue was not idle. "That is only a specimen, Mr. Litton," said she indignantly, and scarce waiting till they were out of earshot of their late companions, "of Sir Reginald's officiousness, and of how much he takes upon himself of what ought to be my father's province. I am sure papa has no idea that you have been treated thus."

"I beg, Miss Lilian, that you will not distress yourself on my account. That you should do so does indeed give me pain, whereas nothing that your brother-in-law can say or do can affect me in any way."

"He has been doing his best then to annoy you?" said Lilian quickly. "I guessed that by the look of his face."

"He does not trouble himself to be very agreeable to me, certainly," answered Walter, smiling. "And yet I have done nothing—voluntarily at least—to offend him."

"I think he is jealous of you, Mr. Litton—I mean as respects your position in this house, and my father's liking for you."

"But I am nobody here; scarcely even a

guest, since I have been employed by Mr. Brown professionally, while Sir Reginald is his own son-in-law."

"Yes; but his egotism is such that he wishes to be all in all here. As it is, I am sorry to say that he exerts a great influence over my father; this notion of our going abroad, for instance, is certainly his own idea."

"You do not wish to go abroad then, Miss Lilian'?"

"Well—no; not for so long, at all events, or rather not for an indefinite time, such as is proposed. One does not wish to be separated from all one's friends, without some notion of when one will see them again—does one?"

"No, indeed. But is it really decided that you are to winter in Italy?"

"Yes; we are to go to Sicily first—in October—in a yacht which Sir Reginald has secured. The sea voyage has been recommended to me, it seems; though I am sure I don't want a sea voyage."

"Perhaps it will do you good; you are not looking in such good health as when I had first the pleasure of seeing you." "Is that wonderful to you who know what ails me? It is this spectacle constantly before me of my sister's unhappiness that wears and worries me so; and her husband, you may depend upon it, will be no kinder at sea than on land. Indeed, when I reflect upon his growing ascendancy over my father, and on the isolation from all our friends that awaits us, it seems almost as though I myself were about to be subjected to his tyranny."

"I have too good an opinion of your sense and spirit to apprehend such a subjugation, Miss Lilian; and in fact I think you have declared your independence pretty plainly this very day."

"Well, I was angry at his behaviour to you, Mr. Litton, and so spoke up, but I sometimes fear that I affect a courage in contending with him that I do not possess. If I was to be ill—I mean, really ill—for example, I often shudder to think what puppets Lotty and myself would be in his hands, now that he has once gained my father's ear."

"He seems to have gained it very quickly," said Walter musingly.

"Yes; it is very strange, but so it is. I am ashamed to say that I think his possessing a title has given him a sort of standpoint; for my part, however, he not only seems no better as Sir Reginald than he was as plain Captain Selwyn, but twenty times worse! Oh, indeed, indeed, it is no laughing matter"—for Walter could not forbear a smile at her womanly vehemence—"and when we are far from home and—and—friends, I shall feel so lonely and so helpless to resist his will!"

"If your apprehensions carry you so far as that, Miss Lilian," said Walter gravely, "I would positively decline to leave England. There is Torquay or the Isle of Wight."

She shook her head. "I have tried all that; but for the first time in my life my father has overruled my wishes. I sometimes think that there is a plot between them; for my own benefit of course, as respects papa; but in Reginald's case, as certainly for his own advantage."

"I wish to Heaven I could help you, Miss Lilian! There is nothing I would not do."

"I know it, Mr. Litton," said she earnestly. "You are a true friend to all

of us; so different from that smoothtongued man yonder, who can also be so rough and tyrannous. But, hush! here comes poor Lotty; and I had much to say to you, which I must not speak of now."

"Well, Mr. Litton, and what do you think of the new bridge?" asked Lady Selwyn, with that artificial sprightliness which a woman must be crushed indeed not to be able to assume upon occasion. "Papa was his own architect, and is immensely proud of it, so I hope you have been going into raptures."

Walter had been standing by the new bridge for the last five minutes, and not even noticed its existence, but now he hastened to express his approval.

"It is Venetian," she went on, "in its style, as papa avers; but Reginald, who, as you know, is so absurd, will call it the Willow Pattern Plate. So the question has been left by consent for us to decide, when we shall have seen Venice with our own eyes."

"You are looking forward with great delight, I suppose, to your first visit to Italy?"

"Well, yes, I suppose I am; but what we all look forward to most is, that the change will do Lilian good. We think her looking so pale and out of sorts."

"Oh, I am well enough," said Lilian

wearily.

"Nay, you can scarcely say that, darling, when papa feels so anxious about you; and even Reginald——"

"Have you told Mr. Litton who is coming to dine to-night?" interrupted Lilian suddenly.

"O no, dear; I thought it was to be a secret. Indeed, Reginald particularly told me not to mention it, so that it might be a pleasurable surprise to Mr. Litton."

"Well, Reginald has not told *me*, nor if he had should I be bound to obey him. Mrs. Sheldon is coming to dinner."

"Mrs. Sheldon! Well, that does astonish me," exclaimed Walter. "I am glad to hear it, however, for it shows that your father has now forgiven everybody who had a hand in making his daughter Lady Selwyn."

"O yes, he has quite forgiven her, and indeed likes her very much."

"Then this is not the first time he has seen her?"

Oh, dear no," answered Lotty gaily; while Lilian leant over the Venetian bridge and shredded a plucked flower into the water with impatient fingers. "She came to call—let me see—the very day after you were here last; and she stayed to dinner, and has been here since very often."

"I don't like Mrs. Sheldon," observed Lilian quietly.

"Well, my dear, we have seen so little of her, that is, comparatively," replied Lotty nervously. "Reginald, who has known her all his life, has a very high opinion of her, you know."

"Yes, I know that," said Lilian.

"And papa is certainly pleased with her."

"I know that too," repeated Lilian, and this time with even more marked significance.

"O Lilian, for shame!" exclaimed Lotty. "What must Mr. Litton think!"

"Mr. Litton is old friend enough, or at all events has shown himself friendly enough to both of us, Lotty, to be told. If we had any friend of our own sex"—and here Lilian's voice was lost in a great sob— "with whom to take counsel it would be different, but, as you know, we have none. We see no one now but Sir Reginald's friends."

"O Lilian, Lilian!" cried Lotty, looking round about her apprehensively; "for my sake, for my sake, say no more; I am sure you will be sorry for it. It is not fair either to me or my husband, or to papa himself."

"Very well; then I will say nothing."

"I hope you have not already said too much," sighed Lotty.

"Nay, indeed, Lady Selwyn," observed Walter, "I have gathered nothing of this forbidden fruit. I have no idea at present as to what it is that you wish Miss Lilian to withhold from me; and I shall make it a point of honour not to guess at it."

"You are very good, I am sure," said Lotty nervously, and speaking like one who repeats a lesson learned by rote. "I think I heard the front-gate click, and it is just the time for papa to be home. Had we not better go and meet him?"

"By all means," cried Walter, manifesting

an extraordinary interest in Mr. Brown's return from the City, but in reality desirous to relieve the young ladies from the embarrassment of his presence; and he moved away accordingly. Lady Selwyn, however, hastened to accompany him; while her sister remained behind, perhaps to remove the traces of her tears. The former made no attempt at conversation with him, and Walter found it no easy matter to keep his thoughts from speculating upon the cause of the strange scene he had just witnessed. That something had occurred with respect to Mrs. Sheldon which had roused Lilian's extreme indignation against her, was evident; and also that she suspected Sir Reginald of designs of which Walter himself, who had such good reason to distrust him, could hardly believe him capable. It really seemed that the reconciliation of the little household at Willowbank had brought with it at last as much of evil as of good.

As they left the shrubbery for the lawn, he saw his host walking rapidly towards them, having apparently just left his son-inlaw, who was standing on the carriagesweep; his brow was knit, and his face wore an angry flush; but as he drew nearer these symptoms of wrath seemed to evaporate, which Walter shrewdly set down to the circumstance that Lady Selwyn was his companion, instead of Lilian, for whom the old gentleman had probably taken her.

"Good day, Mr. Litton, good day," said he; "I am afraid I must plead guilty to having forgotten that I had asked you to look in upon us early, until it was too late to alter the ladies' plans; but I hope Sir Reginald made himself agreeable. Lotty, my dear, if you will go and dress for dinner, and then come down and do the honours to Mr. Litton, I will do my best to amuse him in the meantime. By Jove! what a lucky fellow you are to be dressed, man. It's not often they get me to do it; but we have got another guest to dinner to-day besides yourself, and unfortunately it's a lady."

"I am sure the lady would feel herself greatly complimented if she heard you say

so, papa."

"Tush, tush! I was only speaking generally. It is deuced hard on a man at my time of life to have to change his clothes because a woman is asked to dine. With

you young fellows it is doubtless different; though, when I was your age, Mr. Litton, I had never had a pair of polished leather shoes on my feet, nor so much as a tail-coat on my back. The only evening parties I ever attended were those at the Mechanics' Institute."

"Indeed," said Walter, not knowing what else to say, though he was well aware that a more rapturous appreciation of the difference between Mr. Brown's Now and Then was expected of him. "Such a mode of life must have been very unconventional and independent."

"Gad, I don't know about the independence, sir; I had but a pound a week, except a few shillings that I made by working after-hours, and which I laid by to marry upon. People said it was rash in me to think of a wife; but it is my opinion that when a young fellow gets to be three-and-twenty it is high time for him to think of such things—that is," added Mr. Brown, with sudden gravity, "if he chooses, as I did, one who is accustomed, like himself, to economizing and simple fare; for to drag a girl down from competence, and still

more, opulence to what seems to her like beggary by contrast to it, is a very shameful action. Hollo! Lilian, my dear, where did you spring from?"

"I have only been as far as the new bridge and back, papa."

"Well, you'd better go in and dress for dinner, my dear. Your sister has been gone these five minutes."

"But my toilet does not take quite so long as her ladyship's," returned Lilian, smiling.

"Well, well; rank has its duties, no doubt, as well as its privileges," observed Mr. Brown complacently. "Perhaps you will marry a baronet, or maybe a lord, yourself, Lilian, some day, and then I daresay you will take as long to dress as Lotty."

"Why should I only marry a lord, papa?" said Lilian complainingly. "Can't you look a little higher for me? Why should I not be a duchess, for instance?"

"Go along with you, and dress for dinner," laughed her father, pinching her cheek; but when she left to do his bidding his countenance grew grave. "Lilian is far from well," said he; "I don't think the English climate agrees with her."

"She looked very well when I first had the pleasure of seeing her," observed Walter. "I would fain hope that her indisposition is but temporary: the heat has been exceptionally great this summer."

"No, no; it's not that; but something more serious, though we don't know exactly what. Dr. Agnew has prescribed change of climate. You are doubtless aware that we are going abroad next month?"

"I have heard so, sir," said Walter quietly. "Of course I regret it, for my own sake, but still more for the cause that takes you away."

Common politeness would almost have dictated as much as this, yet Mr. Brown was obviously displeased with the remark, and in his reply to it ignored the sentence that referred to his daughter altogether.

"Well, yes, of course it will separate you from us completely; but a young man like yourself is always making new friends; for my part, I shall be most pleased to forward your interests, if it should ever lie in my power to do so. But I hope, when we come home, we shall hear of you as having made your own way in the world. After all, that is the only satisfactory method of doing it. Look at me: I had no patrons; I did not lay myself out to conciliate society."

"That is very true," mused Walter: his thoughts were far away, dwelling upon the time when the house before him, now so full of light and life, should, with its shuttered windows and tenantless rooms, strike desolation to his soul. Whether Mr. Brown fancied that his guest's attention was wandering, or, on the other hand, deemed his reply too apposite, he was manifestly annoyed. "Come," said he; "though you are dressed fine enough, you will like to wash your hands before dinner, I daresay; let's step inside." And they went in accordingly.





CHAPTER V.

BANISHED FROM EDEN.

OTWITHSTANDING the reputation which Lady Selwyn had acquired for a prolonged toilet, she was the first person to come down to the drawing-room, where Walter had been "kicking his heels," as the phrase goes, while the others had been dressing for dinner. As a matter of fact he had not been kicking his heels, but taking up book after book-profusely illustrated, and wholly unreadable, as most drawing-room books are—after the dissatisfied and changeful fashion of all too early guests; but in his case there was not only his "too earliness" to render him uncomfortable. It was impossible for him to avoid the conviction that, except to one person of that house-

hold, his presence had become unwelcome, and that it had been resolved upon by all the rest that this evening was the last that he should spend as guest beneath that roof. He was a high-spirited young fellow enough, and under similar circumstances would have put on his hat and marched out of any house in London, there and then, without inflicting his company further upon unwilling companions: he was not so fond of a good dinner that he could eat the bread of humiliation with it; but though very sore at heart, he could not make up his mind thus to leave Willowbank. If there was but one within its walls who was glad to see him, she at least, he felt sure, was very glad; if to others he was an object of suspicion or dislike, to her he was a trusted friend She had confided to him her troubles, and would that very day have even taken counsel with him upon some important domestic matter, had she not been overruled by her sister. He had no desire to know what it was-unless his knowledge of it might enable him to give her aid-but it was delightful to him to think that she had thought him worthy of such confidence.

Possessing her good opinion, he could afford to despise the distrust of all the rest; and if he felt indignation against one of them, it was less upon his own account than because that one had rendered himself distastefulnay, abhorrent—to Lilian. As for the old merchant, he only pitied him for his weakness in having been so cajoled by his sonin-law, and dazzled with his fire-new title: and as to Lotty, though he felt she had become inimical to him, he well understood that she was no free agent, but a puppet in her husband's hands. It was impossible that he could ever be angry with her, or regard her otherwise than with tenderness and compassion; and if his feelings towards her had changed, if that respectful devotion for her which he had once entertained no longer existed, it was not from any conduct of hers, but simply that his allegiance had been transferred elsewhere. It was impossible any longer to conceal from himself that another now reigned in her stead; if he had had any doubt of it, the fact that he no longer felt any bitterness or disappointment about Lotty's having ignored himself and his services during the time of her

elopement—that she had not even mentioned his name to Lilian-should have convinced him of this. He cared no more for her indifference or forgetfulness, but only pitied her woes. As she entered the room now, beautiful and elegantly attired, and smiling—though not with the frank smile of old—he experienced none of those sentiments which her presence had once inspired: she seemed to him no longer herself at all; the very words she spoke to himsome conventional apology for his having been left so long alone—were not her words: she was but the mouthpiece and the messenger of another.

"Reggie ought to be ashamed of himself for not having been down before, Mr. Litton; he would finish his cigar, though I told him it was time to dress; but I have hurried over my toilet in order to keep you company, so you must forgive him, for my sake."

"I would forgive him much more than that, Lady Selwyn, for your sake," said Walter: the words had escaped him without his reflecting upon their significance, and the next moment he was sorry that he had so spoken, for poor Lotty's face grew crimson from chin to brow. "As to your toilet having been hurried," added he quickly, "I should never have guessed it, had you not told me so. May I compliment you—as an artist—upon the colour of your dress?"

"It is Japanese," said Lotty, "and a present from papa. He is never tired of giving me little cadeaux of that kind. Reginald says I am like the Prodigal, whose return was solemnized by having beautiful robes given to him; only, in my case, there is no one to object to it: dearest Lilian is not one bit jealous."

"I can well believe that," said Walter enthusiastically. "She has no thought of herself. Before your reconciliation with your father was effected her heart and head were busy with that only; she scarce seemed to live for herself; and even now it is your well-being—your happiness—which concerns her more than her own."

Lotty's pale face flushed, and in her eyes the dewy pearls began to gather as she sighed: "I know it, ah, how well I know it! and if I could but see her happy—in her own way! O Mr. Litton, if I had but the power, as I have the will, to serve you both!" Here she stopped, frightened as it seemed by her own words. "Hush!" whispered she, with her finger on her lip; "don't answer me; I only wish you to know that I am your friend. I can do no good, but you must never think that I mean to do you harm."

"I should not think that, even if you did me harm," said Walter softly. Her words had gone to his heart; not—just then because of their significance, though they were significant indeed; but because this tender timorous woman had ventured thus

to express her sympathy.

"Do not imagine," she went on, in hurried tones, "that Lilian has told me anything; alas! I have read her secret for myself. I can give you nothing but my prayers—not even hope. She is not a girl like me, ungrateful and undutiful, who would leave her father and her home—you must give her up, or she will suffer for it."

"Lady Selwyn!"

"Oh, I know, I know; it is easy to offer such advice as mine. But, since this

can never be, be generous, and spare her all you can. I hear her step upon the stairs—pray promise me." As Walter bowed his head, Lilian entered the room.

"I hope her ladyship has been affable, Mr. Litton?" said she, smiling.

"My dear Lilian," exclaimed Lotty, "how can you be so foolish!"

"Indeed," answered Walter gaily, "I should scarcely have guessed, had I not known it, that there was any social gulf between us."

Then, as they all three laughed, Mr. Brown entered: "Come, come, tell me the joke, young people, or else I shall think you were laughing at me behind my back."

"Mr. Litton has been complimenting me, papa, upon my magnificent apparel," said Lady Selwyn promptly; "and we all think it a little grand for the occasion."

"Not at all," said the old gentleman seriously; "I always like to see people dressed according to their rank."

"But the Queen does not put her crown on every day, papa," said Lilian.

"Well, this is not an everyday occurrence; we have honoured guests to-night.

And besides," added he hastily, "my picture—yours and mine—has come home from the Academy, and that circumstance makes the date important."

"Now, I call that very pretty of papa," said Lady Selwyn. "Don't you, Mr.

Litton?"

"Indeed, I do," said Walter.

"Yes, yes; I shall always value that picture, young man, and, I may add, the artist who painted it."

Walter expressed his sense of the compliment, though, truth to say, the valedictory air with which it was expressed had rubbed the gilt off sadly.

"I hope the other picture will please you equally well, sir, when it is finished."

"I have no doubt of that; I will leave directions with the housekeeper about it, so that you can send it home when it is done."

This was another blow to Walter, for he had secretly intended to keep the Joan in his studio till his patron had returned from abroad; he had felt that that would be a solace to him, and besides, when they did return, it would have provided an excuse for his paying a visit to Willowbank. His

chagrin was such that the entrance of Sir Reginald into the drawing-room was quite a relief to him, since it at once gave a turn to the conversation.

"Your guest is late, Mr. Brown," said the baronet.

"Yes, yes," said the merchant, who had already pulled out his watch with some appearance of impatience. "I hope they understand below-stairs that our party is not complete."

This was a good deal for Mr. Brown to say, since it was his invariable principle—or so at least he had told Walter—to wait dinner for nobody. "Why should the rest of the alphabet have their meat done to rags because Z is always behind-hand?" was one of his favourite sayings.

"My aunt is generally punctual as clockwork," observed Sir Reginald.

"So I should have inferred from what I have seen of her character," answered the other. "Ah, there's the front-door bell!"

It was curious to see how fidgety was Mr. Brown, and still more so to observe, now that the cause of his anxiety was removed and his expected guest had come,

how he abstained from any demonstration of welcome. He remained, as if by design, in the further corner of the apartment when Mrs. Sheldon was announced, and the rest of the company stepped forward to greet her. At the moment Walter thought this was for the purpose of observing how he himself should first meet the lady; that it was a sort of trap laid for him, by which his host might be certified of some suspicion that he and the widow were old acquain-In that case, he resolved to shape his conduct by her own, which would doubtless have been decided upon beforehand. If she shrank from recognition, it would be easy for him to ignore her acquaintance; but he would not again initiate deception.

Notwithstanding her recent bereavement, Mrs. Sheldon was not in widow's weeds; she refused, it seems, to wear the customary garb of woe for a husband who in his lifetime had treated her so ill; or perhaps she knew that crape was unbecoming to her. She was dressed in grey silk, trimmed with black lace; and in the soft lamplight of the drawing-room looked quite bewitching. She embraced Lotty with great effusion,

kissed Lilian on the cheek, nodded familiarly at Reginald, whom she had met before that morning, and then held out her hand to Walter, with a "What! you here, Mr. Litton?" Both speech and action were so marked, so evidently designed to attract attention, that it seemed almost impossible they should have escaped Mr. Brown's notice; yet they did so. He could not of course but have heard and seen, but the circumstance did not appear to strike him as remarkable: doubtless he concluded that Mrs. Sheldon and Walter had met during one of her recent calls at Willowbank, and therefore thought little of her claiming acquaintanceship with him. By the expression of the widow's face it was clear to Walter that her intention, whatever it was, had missed fire in the performance. spectators, too, had evidently expected some result: the baronet frowned, and bit his moustache discontentedly; Lotty, who had cast down her eyes as though to avoid some unpleasant scene, looked up again with an expression of relief; Lilian, who had turned a shade paler as the newcomer addressed Walter, but had never taken her eyes off

her face for a moment, wore a look of disdain. Quite unconscious of all this, Mr. Brown himself had at last come forward to greet his guest. He did so with warmth, yet at the same time, as it seemed to Walter, with as little demonstrativeness as His words were conventional possible. enough, but his voice was unusually soft and low, and he retained the widow's hand in his much longer than is customary. Perhaps it was for this purpose that he had not greeted her earlier, since when other people are waiting to shake hands with a lady you can scarcely keep her fingers prisoners beyond a second or two. How often, or on what occasions, Mrs. Sheldon had been a guest at Willowbank since her mediatorial letter had been received, Walter did not know, but she had evidently made the best use of her time with Mr. Brown. It was borne in upon the young artist at once, that what Lilian had said he was old friend enough to be told, and which Lotty had objected to being revealed to him, was that a certain tenderness had sprung up between the old merchant and this newly-made widow. That Lilian should regard it with aversion,

was natural enough; and that Lotty, being under the dominion of Sir Reginald, this lady's favourite nephew, should not so regard it, was also explicable. He felt that those who were already his enemies in that house had recruited a new ally, more dangerous to him perhaps than any one of them, in the person of the handsome widow; for during their previous acquaintance with one another had he not shown himself proof against her charms; and had not her farewell words to him been such words of bitterness as only the tongue of a slighted woman knows how to frame! He had then been able to despise her charge that he had fallen in love with his friend's wife: but his heart now sank within him at the thought of how she might abuse another's ear with the same calumny; not Mr. Brown's, nor Selwyn's, nor Lotty's, but Lilian's ear. Had he been a wiser and a less honourable man, he would have known that he had it in his power to set himself right-and more than right-with Lilian, by simply revealing the cause of this woman's malice; but such an idea never entered his mind. He felt that there were overwhelming odds against him; and that

probably, though the first blow had missed its mark, he would undergo their onset that very night; but he had no thought of any resistance such as would compromise even the most cruel of his enemies. He had promised Lotty to "spare" her sister; that is, as he understood it, to make her no offer of marriage, since such a union must needs be utterly hopeless; and he had made a promise within himself to spare Lotty; that is, not to imperil by any revelation-however such might excuse his own conduct in Mr. Brown's eyes—the reconcilement that had been effected between herself and her father. His foil, in fact, had the button on, while those of his antagonists were bare.

Mr. Brown of course took Mrs. Sheldon into dinner, while Lilian fell to Sir Reginald's lot, and Lady Selwyn to Walter's. The conversation was lively enough, and though not very general, still more so than on the last occasion when he had sat at the same table; for the baronet's sallies were seconded by his aunt, who, as the merchant admiringly remarked, was "a host in herself as well as a guest," a stroke of pleasantry that Sir Reginald applauded very loudly, and of

which poor Lilian looked utterly ashamed. That the widow was "making the running" with the owner of Willowbank very fast indeed, could not be doubtful to any one that heard her; but nevertheless the whole company was taken by surprise by Mr. Brown's suddenly saying—à propos of the contemplated trip to Italy—"And why should not you come with us, Mrs. Sheldon?"

It had seemed to Walter, whom this speech had positively electrified, that Lilian was here about to speak; but Sir Reginald with his quick, "Ah, why indeed?" was before her, and she said nothing, only cast a despairing look across the table to her sister.

"Well, well, that is a very tempting proposition, Mr. Brown, I own," answered the widow gravely; "but it will need a good deal of consideration."

That she intended to accept the invitation, no one present, except perhaps the host himself, who was very solicitous to extract an assent from her, had any doubt; but she declined for that time to give a definite reply. "It was a delightful idea," she said—

"perhaps almost too pleasurable a one, it would be thought by some, to be entertained by one in her position"—and here she sighed, as though that allusion to her recent bereavement had set some springs of woe flowing—"but it would need very serious reflection before she could say yes or no. She would make up her mind by the next Sunday afternoon, when she had engaged to meet dearest Lotty in the Botanical Gardens at three o'clock."

"Dearest Lotty," instructed by a glance from her lord and master, promised to be punctual to that appointment, and expressed her hope that Mrs. Sheldon's decision would be in the affirmative. Most of this talk had taken place during dessert, and again and again Lilian from the head of the table had looked towards the widow with that significant glance, that even the youngest house-keepers can assume when they think that a change of scene will be desirable. But the other had steadily ignored it, and in one of her endeavours to catch the widow's eye Lilian caught her father's instead.

"Why should you be in such a hurry to leave us, my dear?" said he testily; "we

are quite a family party; and neither Sir Reginald nor Mr. Litton are three-bottle men."

Of course both gentlemen hastened to say that they had had wine enough.

"Very good," continued the host. "Then why should the ladies part company from us at all? What say you, Mrs. Sheldon, to our forming ourselves into a hanging committee, and criticising the new picture that has just come home from the Royal Academy?"

"I should like it of all things," answered she; "that is, if such an ordeal would be agreeable to the artist." It was the first time since their meeting that she had looked Litton in the face, and she smiled as she did so very sweetly.

"It is not a very good time to judge of a picture," observed Walter; not that he cared about that matter in the least, but because he saw that the proposition was for some reason or other distasteful to Lilian.

"But the less light there is, Litton, the more your blushes will be spared," said Sir Reginald gaily.

"Oh, there will be plenty of light," returned the host; "I have had reflectors con-

trived expressly to exhibit it. Come along, Mrs. Sheldon, and pass judgment."

And with that he gallantly offered his arm to the widow, and led the way across the hall into the breakfast-room, where the picture had been hung. The gas apparatus, which had been made to throw its beams upon the canvas, was soon lit, and certainly Walter's handiwork looked to the best advantage.

"There, madam, what do you think of that?" inquired Mr. Brown admiringly. "The idea is Philippa, wife of what's-hisname, interceding for the lives of the citizens of what-you-may-call-it. The Joan which you have seen is to hang opposite, and I must say that a prettier pair of companion pictures it would have been hard to find."

"And when did dear Lotty sit for this beautiful likeness?" asked Mrs. Sheldon, regarding the canvas with all the rapt attention expected in such cases.

"Why, that is the best part of the whole thing, my dear madam: she never sat at all; the likeness is a purely accidental one."

"Dear me! What! he painted it only from memory? Well, that is most credit-

able; and also, I may add, very complimentary to Lotty herself."

And now Walter knew that it was coming, that exposure and undeserved shame awaited him; and also, though he looked neither to left nor right, but kept his gaze fixed upon the canvas, that all who stood by, save Mr. Brown himself, were aware of what was to follow.

"Memory?" echoed the host; "not a bit of it! He had never so much as set eyes upon Lady Selwyn."

"Ah, you mean not after she was Lady Selwyn. Of course, Mr. Litton was well enough acquainted with Lotty's features, since he saw her every day when she was at Penaddon."

For a moment not a word was spoken. Mr. Brown stared with astonished eyes at Walter, evidently expecting him to speak; but when he did not do so, the colour rose into the old merchant's cheeks, and his eyes gleamed fiercely at him from under his shaggy eyebrows.

"What the deuce is the meaning of this, sir?" inquired he roughly. "Have you been telling me lies, then, all along?"

"No, sir; I have told you no lies," answered Walter calmly. "At the same time, I confess with sorrow that I allowed you to believe what was not the fact."

"Then this is a portrait, is it, just like any other portrait?" cried the old man contemptuously. "You excited my interest by a cock-and-bull story, and obtained entrance into this house by false pretences. Nay, I may say you have picked my pocket——"

"O papa, papa!"

It was Lilian's voice, full of shame and agony, but the sound of it, usually so welcome to his ear, only seemed to make the old merchant more furious.

"Be silent, girl!" exclaimed he harshly; and then, with some inconsistency, he added quickly: "What have you to say about it, I should like to know?"

"I was about to observe that, so far from picking your pocket, papa, Mr. Litton would not take a third of the price you offered him."

"That is true enough; but I have some reason to believe that this gentleman had an object to gain in being so liberal in his terms. Yes, sir, in acting with such marvellous magnanimity, you threw out your sprat to catch a whale; though, as to your pretending to be a stranger to her ladyship, I cannot understand indeed why Sir Reginald yonder, and Lotty herself, did not inform me——"

"Well, finding him here, Mr. Brown," interrupted the widow, laying her dainty fingers upon his arm appealingly, "earning such large sums under your patronage, they doubtless hesitated to take the bread out of his mouth as it were by denouncing him as an impostor. It was a weakness in Reginald, no doubt, but I think, considering their old acquaintanceship, a pardonable one."

"Since such is your opinion, Mrs. Sheldon, I will forgive him," replied the old man. "But as for this gentleman—as I daresay he still considers himself to be, though, when a man sails under false colours in humble trade, we have quite another name for him—this is the last time he shall set foot in this house. Have you nothing to say, sir, absolutely nothing to excuse your having played me such a scurvy trick?"

There was a long silence. For the first

time Walter turned about, and threw a glance upon the witnesses of his degradation. Sir Reginald, as if ashamed to meet his gaze, at once cast his eyes upon the ground; Lotty, with her face buried in her handkerchief, was sobbing bitterly; but Lilian, white as marble, gave him back a look of supplication tender and earnest as that which looked out of the picture itself; only added thereto was an expression of heartfelt gratitude, as though the favour asked had been already granted.

"No, Mr. Brown," answered he, in a firm voice, "I have nothing to say."

"Then the sooner you leave this house the better I shall be pleased," was the grim

reply.

In the glare of the gaslight he saw two faces, the recollection of which was doomed to haunt him long with a bitter sense of humiliation—one, his host's, full of honest scorn; the other, scornful too, but with the triumphant malice of a slighted woman. He passed out and before them both without a word, and into the hall, from whence he took down his hat and coat with his own hands, and left the house.



CHAPTER VI.

A FRIEND IN NEED.

T is not very easy, even to the best of us, to own we are in the wrong, even when we are so; but to sit

silent under unmerited reproaches, is to obtain a moral victory of the very highest order.

Walter Litton had been to blame in allowing his host to deceive himself as to the Philippa having been an accidental likeness of his married daughter, but he had done so solely in her interest; the old merchant had laid great stress upon the undesigned coincidence; had tacitly, in fact, almost acknowledged his coming upon the picture in the Academy as a providential arrangement to turn his heart towards a reconciliation with his exiled child; and you. II.

Walter, even if left to himself in the matter —and not, as we know he was, exhorted by another to concealment—would not perhaps have had the courage to undeceive him. It was a venial sin at worst, and had no selfish ends; yet, not only had a selfish end been imputed to him, and had he been punished for it, but others twenty times more blameworthy, and who had profited by his offence, had stood by in silence, while he was condemned. It was, as we have said, the bent of Walter's mind, whenever the first gust of resentment had passed away from it, to seek for some palliation in those who angered him; but in this case his charity could find no excuse for them. The old merchant himself he did not blame; it was only reasonable that he should have imputed to him a selfish motive for a deception which was otherwise inexplicable; the reconciliation with the Selwyns had become so complete by this time, that he did not see "the join;" now that the thing had been effected, the actual circumstances by which it had been brought about were forgotten; and besides, it was painful to him to revert to them. Moreover, Mr. Brown had been as

clay in the cunning hands of the widow, for whom it was evident he entertained a warmer feeling than the aunt of one's sonin-law usually inspires. He was an honest old fellow, with some worthy qualities; and the young artist did not forget, notwithstanding his late calumnious words, that he had shown himself friendlily disposed towards him.

Nor did Walter feel the least animosity against Lotty: that there was some soreness in connexion with her conduct towards him was but natural, but it did not rankle: he transferred, as it were, what wrong she had done him to her husband's account, to whom he was already so considerably indebted in that way. The menace which Sir Reginald had uttered when Walter had declined to give any promise as respected Lilian-a promise, by-the-by, which he had given to Lotty without the least compulsion—had been carried out to the uttermost. He could not but conclude that his ejection from Willowbank had been decided upon by Selwyn and his aunt long before it took place, and that it would have been accomplished that evening, somehow; the exhi-

bition of the picture had happened to furnish an opportunity, but, in any case, one would have been found. Curiously enough, his feelings towards his former friend were not so bitter as against the widow; she had, it is true, obvious reasons for being hostile to him, first, because he had shown himself indifferent to her; and secondly, because she had matrimonial designs upon the old merchant, to which his presence would be more or less of an obstacle. He was not so ignorant of woman's nature but that he understood how those two causes of dislike -which to mere masculine sense would appear incompatible-were cumulative; and so far he forgave her. But what he resented—nay, what he hated her for—was, that she, a woman, had joined with Reginald against Lilian. From what the latter had hinted, he knew that Mrs. Sheldon's designs upon Mr. Brown were most distasteful to his daughter, and he felt that they would not be encouraged by Sir Reginald, as they obviously were, unless some treaty had been entered into between the two relatives, the nature of which it was not difficult to guess. If Mrs. Sheldon should marry Mr. Brown,

her influence with him would doubtless be used to the uttermost to prevent Lilian from marrying anybody, so that Sir Reginald, by right of his wife, should be his sole heir. Walter did not go so far even in his thoughts as to accuse them of speculating upon her death; though she was certainly delicate and ailing, and it was very doubtful if this expedition abroad would not do her more harm than good; but it was clear that she was slipping into the hands of two persons, both of powerful will, and whose interests were diametrically opposed to her Moreover, she had acknowledged, with respect to one of them, that she looked forward with apprehension to bodily ailment, lest, through weakness, she should be be unable to cope with him. "We have no friend in the world, Mr. Litton," she had said, speaking of her sister and herself, "but you."

This was the consideration that pressed upon Walter's mind as he walked home that night from Willowbank, and pressed with such weight and urgency as made his own humiliation light indeed. That he loved Lilian he no longer attempted to conceal from himself: but it was at least with no selfish love. Many men, upon having had their social relations with a man like Mr. Christopher Brown thus summarily broken off, would have felt themselves justified in acting quite independently of him with respect to his daughter; like détenus who have been harshly treated and imprisoned, they would have considered themselves no longer on parole. But it was not so with Litton. He was a man of sensitive honour, and he could not forget that the old merchant had admitted him to his house, whether as guest or artist, upon the tacit understanding that he would not abuse his position by wooing his daughter; moreover, he had promised Lotty not to press a hopeless suit; not to make Lilian still more wretched than she was by the confession of a love which could never be realized. He now knew from her sister's lips that she returned his love; but yet it behoved him to keep his word.

His distress and anxiety upon her own account, however, were so extreme, that he determined to seek the advice of another as to some remedy for her position. Hitherto

he had held her as a sacred thing, aloof from others, just as (it must be confessed) he had of old held Lotty, and had never made her the topic of his talk even with honest Jack Pelter, although the latter was by no means ignorant of her existence, and had perhaps drawn his own conclusions with respect to the feelings that his young friend entertained towards her. Jack was not one to be curious in regard to his friend's affairs, and the last man in the world to seek for information where it was evident that confidence was withheld from him: but he was also capable of taking in his friend's welfare an interest, we do not say more lively than in his own, for to that he was too often deaf and blind, but one which would even lead him to take trouble, which was the thing he hated more even than the hanging committee of the Academy. Of Jack's friendship Walter stood in no doubt whatever; it was only of his power to aid him in this matter that he doubted; and yet, in the present strait, he felt that even if no aid should be forthcoming, but only sympathy, it would be very grateful to him. It could not be said that any actual responsibility rested upon him, and yet he had a sense of something like it-of a weight that it behoved him to get another pair of shoulders, provided they were willing ones, to share. Bohemian as Jack was in his habits, and what is called "feckless" as regarded his own affairs. Walter had found his advice upon those matters in which he had consulted it very sensible and sound; the only thing that made him pause was the fear that Pelter might not handle this exceedingly delicate subject with due respect; that the counsel he might receive would be couched in terms of raillery and ridicule, every word of which would have a barb for him, for his heart was sore. Nevertheless, he made up his mind to speak with Jack. The opportunity was not long in coming, for he found his friend at home and alone, swathed in an old dressing-gown that might have suited the Grand Turk, had he been forced to pay his debts, a smoking-cap upon his head, and in his mouth a pipe so short that it was a wonder it did not burn his beard. Such was the appearance of the oracle he designed to consult, while the source of its inspiration

was indicated by a huge tumbler of whisky-and-water.

"What! back so soon, my lad, from the rich man's feast, and with such an anxious brow!" cried Pelter. "Has his salmon, then, disagreed with you? What says the proverb: 'Be not desirous of his dainties, and put a knife to thy throat if thou be a man given to appetite.' The German translation is, 'Put thy knife in thy mouth;' but it's all one."

"Something has disagreed with me, Jack," answered Walter gravely; "but it was not the salmon nor yet the cucumber."

"Perhaps it was the company?"

"Well, yes; it was the company, though how you came to guess it is more than I can understand."

"Well, when a man comes home so early from a quiet dinner-party, and not intoxicated, it is manifest that he has been kicked out for some other indiscretion. There has been a quarrel, and probably about a woman."

"No, Jack; there has been no quarrel, only an unfortunate misunderstanding."

"Just so; and it has not been about a

woman, but concerning a young lady, or an angel. You state the whole argument of the plot, whereas I only gave the synopsis."

"To oblige me, Jack, would you be kind enough to be serious for the next half-hour," pleaded Walter.

"The task is long, and, considering the world we live in, very difficult."

"If you have drunk too much whisky, Pelter, I will wait till to-morrow," said Walter with irritation.

"There is no such thing as 'too much whisky,' my friend," returned the other imperturbably, "for in that case the Millennium-which means ten thousand dozenwould have already arrived. But if you hint that I am drunk, that is a suggestio falsi—a most infamous calumny. I only hope to be so presently. In the meantime, I am as steady as the Three per Cents. Nevertheless, to oblige you, and under protest as to the operation being necessary, I will dip my head in cold water." Whereupon, Mr. Pelter rose with dignity, and marching into his bedroom with unfaltering steps, performed the ablution in question, and came back with a towel in his hand, and dripping like a water-dog. "You arrested me on my way to happiness, Watty, but I have now retraced my steps, and am quite in a position to listen to your pitiful story."

"It is not pitiful as regards myself, at all," said Walter.

"It will be, if you don't take a pipe. I can't bear to see a fellow-creature without tobacco when I am smoking.—That's right; secure complete combustion, and then fire away."

There were several pipes smoked both by listener and narrator, before Walter came to the end of his story. At first, his companion gave only so much attention as politeness demanded; but as the tale proceeded, his interest seemed to increase, and every now and then was manifested by an observation or inquiry. When Walter described Selwyn's behaviour to him on the lawn, Jack chuckled aloud.

"Why do you laugh?" asked the other.

"Well, your friend was so very frank," said he. "'I have married one of this man's daughters, and I mean to have the

money of the other,' was really too ingenuous."

"Don't call him my friend, I beg," said

Walter bitterly.

- "I obey you, my good fellow, very cheerfully. You will bear me witness that up to this moment I have never said one word against Captain Selwyn; I have always respected your friendship for him, but I have long felt it to be misplaced. Sir Reginald Selwyn, Baronet of the United Kingdom"—for Walter had gone into details respecting matters at Willowbank—"may not be a pusillanimous cuss (since he fought at Balaklava), but he is a bad lot, that is certain."
- "I am afraid he is, and yet not worse than his aunt Sheldon."
 - "His aunt Sheldon! Who is she?"
- "Why, surely, I must have spoken to you of her before, as being the lady from whose house Sir Reginald was married?"
- "You never mentioned her by name. There was a little veil, my friend, kept over all that happened during that expedition to Cornwall. I never sought to raise it, but I

think at one time you had your reasons for being reticent about that matter. Without laying claim to any superhuman intelligence, it was plain to me that you were smitten very severely. Was it this widow that gave the wound?"

"No; it certainly was not; though, between ourselves, she tried to wound me. I should have thought this morning that nothing would ever have induced me to mention such a thing; but the fact is, she is a most dangerous woman, as you shall hear." Then he went on to speak of the apprehensions which Lilian had expressed to him: of the evident alliance that existed between Sir Reginald and his aunt; of the designs of the latter upon the old merchant; and of those events of the past evening with which we are already acquainted.

"And what am I to understand are your present relations with Miss Lilian?" inquired Pelter, when the other had come to an end.

"I love her; but I have not told her my love; nor do I mean to tell it. I have promised as much to her sister."

- "Upon the ground that such a declaration would make Miss Lilian more unhappy?"
 - "Yes."
- "But are you sure that it would do so?"
- "I think so; since our marriage is so utterly out of the question."
- "It is unfortunate—mind, I don't say you are wrong—but it is unfortunate that you are so scrupulous, since you thus deprive yourself of any pretence for interference; you cannot even speak confidentially to Miss Lilian herself."

"Oh, I think I could do that," said Walter naïvely.

Jack smiled, but immediately resumed the look of judicial gravity which he had worn throughout the narrative.

"Well, you must warn her against this widow."

"She needs no warning, my dear fellow. My impression is, that she distrusts her even more than Reginald. At present, you see, the poor girl has her father to appeal to; but should this woman become her stepmother, or even gain a permanent influence over the old man, she would be utterly defenceless."

"Defenceless against what? You don't suppose they mean to take her abroad, and then, between them, to murder her for her money?"

"Heaven forbid! But they may kill her without intending it. She is weak and ailing even now; it is not change of scene, but change of society that she wants; cooped up with a tyrant, a slave, and an adventuress—"

"Why do you call this rich widow an adventuress?" interrupted Pelter, sharply.

"There is only her own word for her being rich; she was certainly poor enough when I knew her, and what but poverty could induce her to lay siege to Mr. Brown?"

Jack smiled again. "There is no accounting for tastes, my good fellow; some ladies are very catholic in that way. Of course, it seems to you impossible that one who has made herself so agreeable to Walter Litton, should throw the handkerchief to any one else."

"There is no pretence of affection in the

matter, Pelter. She fools him to the top of his bent, and that so openly, that it is plain she feels she has hooked him. It seems to me the height of cruelty to let that poor girl leave England in such company."

"But how do you propose to stop her? There is some ukase, I believe, beginning Ne exeat regno, but I don't know where it's

to be got."

"Of course I can't stop her," answered Walter, taking no notice of the last suggestion, "nor, what is worse, can I stop this Mrs. Sheldon from going with her, though I feel she will thus be in the worst hands she could be in. I had no hope, of course, that you would be able to help me in the matter, but I was so sore about it, and so miserable, that I could not keep my wretchedness to myself."

"Poor boy, poor boy!" said Pelter softly. Then, after a little pause: "It is not certain, however, that this lady intends to join

the party in their tour abroad."

"O yes, it is; she only pretended to hesitate. She is to communicate her decision to Lady Selwyn on Sunday. She made an appointment with her in the Botanical Gardens for three o'clock."

"How do people get into the Botanical Gardens on Sunday?"

"My dear Pelter, why, by members' tickets of course. Do you suppose they climb over the railings, or pay sixpence for a refreshment ticket, as they do at Cremorne?"

"I didn't know," said Jack, humbly. There was a long silence, during which Pelter pulled at his pipe with the gravity of a Red Indian at the council-fire.

"I suppose nothing can be done?" observed Walter, dreamily.

"I am not sure, lad; still, I do think-"

"Think what? You have a plan in your head; I can see you have!" cried Walter joyfully.

"I felt I was getting bald," replied Jack calmly, "but I had hoped not so as to show the brain. I have a plan, it is true, but I don't know that it will succeed."

"But what do you think? I only ask you what you think?"

"Well, I honestly tell you that I think Miss Lilian will marry a banker, about five VOL. II. 8 years older than her father; that is how these things generally end."

"I did not ask you that question, Pelter; I asked you whether you thought it possible that this woman, Mrs. Sheldon, could be prevented from accompanying her abroad."

"Why yes, I think she could; that is,

if you could only-"

"Only what? There is no sacrifice that I would not make—no trouble that I would not take, in order to accomplish that!"

"Well then, if you could only get a couple of tickets for us two for the Botanical Gardens next Sunday."

"My dear Jack, I could get fifty! But how can that possibly help us?"

"That remains to be proved; but I believe it will. As to the 'How,' you must permit me to be silent upon that point just for the present."

"Oh, Jack, if you succeed, how shall I

ever be able to thank you enough?"

"I don't know I am sure; it will be a great personal sacrifice on my part, no doubt, because I have always avoided such places on principle. And then there's another objection; but there, in for a penny

in for a pound; one should never spoil a ship for a pound of tar."

"What a real good friend you are, Jack! But what's the other objection?"

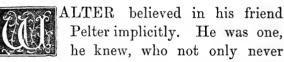
"Well, you know they wont allow a fellow to smoke in the Botanical Gardens."





CHAPTER VII.

IN THE BOTANICAL GARDENS.



fell short of his promises, but was the last man to suggest a groundless hope. As to what device he had in his mind for hindering Mrs. Sheldon from making one of the yachting-party to Italy, he could make no conjecture; but he was confident that the design was seriously entertained. He knew, too, that Jack was serious in requesting him to be silent upon the matter; but whether the self-sacrifice upon his friend's part was such as he had described it to be, he had grave doubts.

Those who were unacquainted with Pelter's character, or with the tenets of the

class he belonged to, might well imagine that the talk of principle in such a matter as going to the Botanical Gardens was a mere joke, like his complaint of not being allowed to smoke there. But this, Walter knew, was not the case. Jack was a Bohemian of the first (whisky and) water. He hated society, and abjured all its pomps and ceremonies with as much earnestness as any young girl who "takes the veil." The latter sometimes becomes the Bride of Heaven, because an earthly husband has been denied her; but Jack could have been admitted into the world of fashion if he had been so minded, and he had resolutely kept out of it. He would go to no party for which it would have been necessary to have put on evening-dress, or, as he termed it, his go-to-meeting clothes. He would dine at no board at which smoking immediately after the meal was objected to. He would as soon have thought of voluntarily putting his feet into "the Boots" of James II., used to correct the Covenanters, as into a pair of "polished leathers." He was quite incapable of understanding the feeling which prompts a conventional person to go

to church in a high hat, in place of a wideawake; instead of merely laughing at it, he loathed it, and imagined what is a mere mechanical act of "respectability," to be significant of baseness of mind. The sort of man who thought that religion had anything to do with the shape of a hat, was honest Jack's aversion. He stood, in reality, on high moral ground, only, all his social prejudices being inverted, he seemed, to the common eye, to stand very low indeed. Our views of mankind depend very much upon which end of the social telescope we apply to them. The true history of Life in Bohemia, though it has been once attempted, still remains to be written; it is a subject much too wide for these pages, but we may here observe of it, that its attractions are apt to decrease, even more than is customary, with years. Whenever I see a gallant gay Bohemian, I cannot help inwardly saying to him, what Metternich said to the young gentleman who had not learned how to play whist: "Ah, sir, what an old age are you preparing for yourself!" For it is observable of the whole Bohemian race, that when

Time begins to tell upon them, they turn (like some wines, which, when drunk young, are very pleasant) a little acid. They are at no epoch, indeed, to be confounded with the great "Pooh-pooh", school, with whom nothing is new, nothing is true, and everything is a bore, and to which they are vastly superior; but they arrive by another road at much the same place. They have no wife, to be called such, and no home worthy of the name; they have been generous to women, in thought as well as deed; but women are not grateful for such generosity; and an old age without a tender tie is deplorable. To that old age, though not yet past his meridian, poor Jack was tending fast; and, what was worse for him, he had the good sense to know it. His very affection for Walter was perhaps all the stronger, because he knew that it would be shortlived; that is, that a spot would one day be reached from which their paths must diverge, after which every step would widen the gulf between them. For Walter was no Bohemian, and Jack was far too good a fellow to attempt to proselytize him. As for himself, however, he would die in the Faith; and though—or perhaps because he had already doubts of the happiness it was capable of conferring, he clung to it with greater obstinacy than ever. Thus it was no small matter that would have induced Mr. Pelter to bow the knee to Baal, and present himself in an "allrounder" hat, and coat of formal cut at the Botanical Gardens on a Sunday. The hat, indeed, would be purchased for the occasion; but as to the coat—"Do you think any of these will do?" inquired he of Walter, exhibiting to him the contents of his scanty wardrobe, which, to say truth, were rather of an artistic than fashionable make.

"My dear Jack, you look like a gentleman in anything," said Walter, assuringly.

"You are very good to say so," replied his friend, ruefully; "though it strikes me that you have paid me a compliment at the expense of my tailor."

But nevertheless Walter was right; it would have been impossible for any one of intelligence superior to that of a vestryman to have mistaken Mr. John Pelter for a snob.

Whatever he undertook to do, he did thoroughly, and having in this case abjured one principle, he proceeded to abjure another by insisting on punctuality,

"We should be at this place before your friends," said he, "if my plan is to take

effect."

"And may I now ask what that plan is?"

"No, my lad, if you would be so good, neither now nor never; let it suffice you to note the result of it."

Walter was much astonished, but of course said nothing beyond promising to avoid the topic.

At half-past two they accordingly presented themselves at the Gardens. The main body of fashionable folks had not yet arrived; but a few promenaders were walking up and down the lawn, and the front row of chairs was fast filling with those who had come both to see and to be seen.

The two young men took their seats under a tree, from which they could watch those who entered by the chief turnstile.

"I shall know Lady Selwyn from your picture, I conclude?" observed Pelter.

"Well, I flatter myself you will; and as

for Mrs. Sheldon, you may recognise her——"

"Hush!" cried Pelter, "there she is;" and indeed at that moment the widow entered the grounds.

"Why, how did you know?" was the question upon Walter's lips; but it was arrested by a glance at his companion's face which had on the instant altered in a very remarkable manner. His florid complexion had become quite pale; his lips, generally parted with a slight smile, had closed together tightly; and the expression of his eyes had grown severe almost to menace.

"Let me have a few minutes' talk with this lady alone," said he quickly; and rising from his chair he stepped down the long broad walk to meet her.

She was moving very leisurely, quietly scanning the row of faces in search no doubt of Lady Selwyn; her attire was fault-less, her air full of that careless grace which seems to ignore emotion of all kinds as vulgarity; when suddenly she dropped her veil, and turned as if to retrace her steps. She was not however permitted to do so alone; before she had got ten yards Pelter

overtook her, and taking his hat off as to an old acquaintance at once addressed her, and then attached himself to her side. As to what he said Walter of course could make no guess; but whatever it was the widow appeared to listen to it with grave attention, though exhibiting neither alarm nor surprise. Nay, when the end of the lawn was reached, instead of returning up it like other promenaders, this pair betook themselves to a side-walk, and could be seen through the leafy screen evidently engrossed in talk. That Jack was "thorough" in his views of friendship, and energetic enough when once roused to action, Walter was well aware: but that he should have thus sailed down upon a strange flag, and as it were piratically captured her, astounded him not a little. Was it possible, he had begun to think, that she was altogether a strange flag? when under the trellised gateway there appeared two persons whose advent turned his thoughts at once into quite another channel.

Lilian and Lotty had entered the gardens. The latter, of course, Walter had expected to see; but the former's coming had been wholly unlooked for, and it filled him with an eager joy, which for the moment no prudent reflections could dispel. He had scarcely dared to hope to have speech with her before her departure abroad, or perhaps even ever again; he had steadfastly purposed not to seek a meeting with her; she should have, he had resolved, no further sorrow because of him; he loved her, and she knew it; but in leaving England she should at least not have to break asunder an acknowledged tie. Such had been his resolute determination; but now, as she came slowly up the lawn with her beautiful face so pale and thoughtful, and her large eyes fixed sorrowfully upon the ground, his heart melted within him, and his resolutions with it. Her sister looked timorously from right to left in search of her she had come to meet; but Lilian, it was plain, had no anxiety upon that account; her thoughts were deeper, and he dared to hope that they might be busy with him. Though they were to be parted, and for ever, was it not right-or if it was wrong, was not the temptation irresistible, since the opportunity thus offered itself—to say to her a few simple

words of farewell? He rose from his seat and made his way towards them. Lady Selwyn was the first to see him; he saw her start and tremble, and knew that she was pressing her sister's hand, and whispering to her that he was near. Then Lilian looked up, crimson from brow to chin, but wearing such a happy smile, and held out her little hand.

"I am so glad to see you, Mr. Litton." If the light in her eyes was not love-light, thought Walter, it was the very best imitation of it that female ingenuity had yet discovered. It seemed as if Lilian was conscious of this too; that a maidenly fear of having betrayed too much had seized her, for she added hastily: "We are both so glad, because we feel that we owe you reparation."

If Lady Selwyn was glad she did not look so glad as she looked frightened. "There are so many people here," whispered she timidly; "let us cross the broad walk to the other side."

Indeed, their present locality, exposed to the fire of a hundred pair of eyes and ears, was not one very suitable for explanations; whereas, upon the other side, there were no sitters, and but few walkers. So they crossed over.

"We have to apologize to you, Mr. Litton—all of us," continued Lilian with emphasis, "for the treatment you so unjustly received at Willowbank the other evening——"

"I beg you will not do so," interrupted Walter; "any allusion to the matter must needs give you pain, and therefore give me pain; whereas, otherwise I feel no pain at all. It could not be helped, and I perfectly understood why it could not be so."

"It could be helped!" cried Lilian, indignantly; "it was cowardly and shameful!——"

"Now, Lilian, dear," broke in Lotty, pleadingly, "why go into that when Mr. Litton says he perfectly understands how we were all situated."

"He was turned out of our house," said Lilian, "as though it had been he who had played a treacherous and dishonest part; while others who were really to blame made profit by it."

"I entreat that you will say no more

about it," said Walter, earnestly. "What alone distresses me in the matter is the reflection that your father must needs have so poor an opinion of me; but that will all come right in time, and even if it does not, I have the satisfaction of feeling that I have been of some service to him, though he does not know it."

"And to others who do know it, but have not acknowledged it," added Lilian, indignantly.

"For my part, Mr. Litton," said Lotty, tearfully, "I do acknowledge it, believe me, with all my heart. I am sure you have behaved most generously, and—and—like a gentleman." Lilian laughed a bitter laugh, which, however, from its very bitterness, was sweet to Walter's ears. "Let us hope," continued her sister, "that a time will come when it will be safe to tell dear papa the whole circumstance of the case; and then I am sure he will do full justice to you. I am afraid he must not know that we have met you here; and if Mrs. Sheldon should see us I am afraid—"

"We shall have quite enough of Mrs. Sheldon for the next six months," broke in

Lilian, haughtily; "and what that woman may choose to say of us—of me at least—is a matter of the most supreme indifference to me. We were to meet here to receive her decision—about which she pretended to have some doubts—respecting her going abroad with us."

"She is here already, but she has a friend with her," added Walter quickly, as Lady Selwyn uttered a little cry of terror. "We can keep out of her way if you wish it; and if my company is really a source of alarm to you, I will withdraw at once."

"Let us keep out of her way, by all means," ejaculated Lady Selwyn, "until you have done your talk."

"I shall not move an inch out of Mrs. Sheldon's way," observed Lilian, decisively; and since she did not tell Walter to withdraw, he stayed.

"And when are you to start for Italy?" inquired he.

"We do not go to Italy at all, at least for the present, but to Sicily," answered Lilian. "Our first destination is Messina; but our plan is to coast round the island. I have proposed that in hopes Mrs. Sheldon may prove to be a bad sailor, in which case we shall leave her on shore."

"O Lilian!" exclaimed Lotty, reprovingly; "and you know that Reggie himself is never quite happy on board ship."

"We start on Saturday, I believe, from Plymouth," continued Lilian, without noticing this remonstrance.

"I trust the voyage may prove much pleasanter to you than you anticipate," said Walter, mechanically, "and that your health may be restored by it."

"As to my health," sighed she, "I cannot say; but if it be true that the bitterest medicine is often the most beneficial, it certainly ought to do me good. The thought of it is hateful to me; nay, more, if there be such a thing as a presentiment, if misfortune is ever permitted to cast its shadow before it, then, indeed, will evil come of it." She shuddered, and drew her lace shawl around her, as though its fragile folds could give her warmth.

"Now is it not childish of dear Lilian to go on like that, Mr. Litton?" urged Lady Selwyn. "I assure you this is what I have to listen to every day." "If I could only do anything to give you the least comfort," murmured Walter beneath his breath.

"Indeed, you have done more for me, for all of us, already, than we deserve: while

your requital has been-"

"Good heavens! there is Mrs. Sheldon," exclaimed Lotty. "She is looking down the row for us; I told her we should be there, you know. Had we not better go and join her?"

"As you please," answered Lilian, coldly. Whether from fear of the widow, or from a kindly impulse which prompted her to leave the young people alone for a few seconds, Lady Selwyn here left her sister's side, and crossed over to where Mrs. Sheldon stood.

"I hope I may be allowed to see you when you return to England?" said Walter, softly.

"O yes—if I ever do return," sighed

Lilian.

"For Heaven's sake, do not encourage such forebodings. For myself, I am no believer in them; but the knowledge that you entertain them is itself a real misfortune to me. You have no friend, Miss Liliannone—who has a greater regard for you, a deeper devotion to your interests than myself."

"You have proved it, Mr. Litton," answered she, in tones scarce above a whisper. "I would that it had been in my power to show my sense of your good——"

"Here is Mrs. Sheldon, Lilian!" exclaimed Lotty. She pitched her voice in so high a key that it almost sounded like a warning, which perhaps the contiguity of the young couple had suggested to her; for the fact was, although they themselves were ignorant of it, that they were standing hand in hand.

"How are you, my dear Lilian?" inquired the widow pathetically. "It is quite an unexpected pleasure to see you here; and I hope I may draw good auguries from it."

"Thank you, I am pretty well," returned Lilian, icily.—"This is Mr. Litton. There is no occasion for ignoring your old acquaintance here, I suppose."

Mrs. Sheldon cast a sharp and piercing glance at Walter. The words "your old acquaintance" had a meaning for her which the speaker did not suspect; then, as if satisfied with her scrutiny, she smiled, and held out her hand. "Mr. Litton knows, I am sure, that nothing but a hard necessity compelled me to behave towards him as I did the other evening. His generous nature will forgive me for having sacrificed him for the good of others."

Walter bowed, but said nothing.

"We have all to make our sacrifices in that way," she continued. "I am myself, for instance, compelled to forego the pleasure of accompanying these dear girls abroad."

"What! are you not going with us!" inquired Lady Selwyn. "That will be a great disappointment to Reginald, I am sure."

"And I hope not only to Reginald," answered the widow, laughing. "These newly married young ladies think only of their husbands, you see, Mr. Litton, which makes them seem sometimes almost rude."

"Indeed, I did not mean to be rude," answered Lotty, colouring very much. "Of course we shall all be disappointed; and we had counted on your coming as almost certain."

"Well, I will tell you all about it when we get home. I think it due to your good father to let him know at once the change in my arrangements—not that I wish to hurry Mr. Litton away, I'm sure."

"I was just about to take my leave," said

Walter, "at all events."

"Well, you and I are to be left in England, you know, and will doubtless meet again," smiled the widow as she shook hands with him. She had really carried matters off exceedingly well, considering the hostile company in which she found herself, and that Lilian had not expressed one syllable of regret at her change of plan.

"Good-bye, Lady Selwyn," said Walter kindly, and as he pressed her hand the ready tears rose to her eyes. She knew, poor soul, that he knew how she had no longer any will nor any way of her own, and that, though she had injured him, he forgave her. As she turned from him, she took Mrs. Sheldon's arm, and, though trembling at her own audacity, led her a few steps away.

"God bless you, Lilian!" murmured Walter.

"And God bless you!" was the whispered response; their hands met in one long pressure, and then they parted without another word.

Walter stood and watched till the three ladies reached the gate, where Lilian turned, as he knew she would, to give him a farewell look; and then, with a sigh, he moved away to seek his friend. But Mr. Pelter was no longer visible. He had doubtless taken himself home, to remove that badge of social servitude—his high-crowned hat; and Walter followed, heavy at heart, but not without a keen curiosity with respect to the means which Jack had employed to alter the widow's plans. For that to Jack, strange as it might appear, Lilian was somehow or other indebted for her escape from that distasteful companionship, Walter had no doubt.





CHAPTER VIII.

HOW HE DID IT.

S Walter had expected, he found, upon reaching Beech Street, that his friend had arrived before him.

He found him walking up and down his studio with quick strides, without his pipe (which was itself a portent), and with his hands behind him, still gloved. Jack seldom wore gloves, but if compelled to do so, was wont to tear them off upon the first opportunity, as though they had been the tunic of Nessus.

"My dear Jack," said Walter, "is it really to the influence of your eloquence with Mrs. Sheldon that I am indebted for this great service? I heard her with my own ears tell Lilian that she had altered her plans, and would not accompany them to Sicily."

"To my influence, yes—to my eloquence, certainly not," returned Pelter, gravely. "I used no honeyed words."

"Whatever words you used, I am most grateful to you, as Lilian too would say, did she know to whom she was indebted."

"It cost me something, lad," sighed Pelter, throwing himself into a chair—
"something that smug sleek men declare they value beyond all else, and which is dear even to me—namely, self-respect."

"I hope not, Jack; not for my sake, nor—nor any one's."

"Ay, but it was so, for I had to lie to her, and, what is worse, to threaten her. Fancy using threats to a woman!"

"But why should she fear you, or your threats either?"

"Well, that's too long a story to tell now. But don't you remember, Walter, how, at the beginning of this Willowbank business, and when we were speculating as to who had sent the offer for your Philippa, that I gave you a leaf of my life that you might take a lesson from it—how, when I was young, and honest, and credulous—like yourself, I was once fooled by a woman.

You know what Pope says about the sex, and that I don't go with him; but in this case he was right. Intrigue was the atmosphere of that woman's life, and men's hearts her playthings. But she had not the wit for the work, or she would never have lied except with her tongue; as it was, she did so in black and white, and amongst others, to me. When we parted—when she flung me aside, like yonder glove"-and he cast one violently on the floor-" she asked me to give her back her letters; but that was impossible, because I had burned them every one before she asked me. Judging me by her own crafty, treacherous self, she did not believe me, and I took no pains to convince her; since she chose, after all that had passed between us, to think me capable of a base revenge, I let her do so; and today she suffered for it."

"Then you knew who this Mrs. Sheldon was from the moment I mentioned her?" observed Walter.

"I guessed it, lad. It was not the name I had known her under, but I heard that she had taken it; and, besides, I recognised your portrait of her. As for her face, I

should have known it, had I not seen it for twenty years instead of ten, at the first glance. 'It can make no more mischief among men, so you have set it against your own sex, madam, have you?' That shaft went home, I promise you."

"What! you told her that?" exclaimed Walter, excitedly.

"Ay, and she knew who was meant. At first, she thought I was pleading my own cause, not yours; but I undeceived her I told her that it might have been so once; that years ago I might have loved some pure and simple girl, such as your Lilian, had my experience of womankind been happier in those days; but as it was, that I had had no cause to trust in woman. She tried to fool me even then—'tis second nature with her, and first as well-but she might as well (as I told her) have fawned upon the turnstile. Then I made her understand not only that her past, but that her present was known to me, even to the fact that, with her nephew's aid, she was angling for the rich merchant.

"'What? are you jealous, then, dear Jack?' sighed she.

"I swear it made me laugh aloud to hear her.

"'No,' said I; 'I was not jealous, but resolute that her marriage with Mr. Christopher Brown should not take place—that I was acquainted with her plans, and meant, so far as he was concerned, to prevent them; not, indeed, for his sake, but for his daughter's; and, to begin with, that she was not to accompany the family to Italy."

All this had been told in a quiet cynical manner, very different from Pelter's usual tone; but when here, amazed, Walter inquired what right his friend had had to control Mrs. Sheldon's movements, he answered, vehemently. "What right? Why, the right of the strongest. Is it for you to have scruples—you, who affect to love this girl, and would have me preserve her—scruples against a serpent? She is harmless now; but, let me tell you, my snake-charming was not done by soft words."

"Indeed, my friend, you mistake me," cried Walter; "every one has a right to protect the weak against the wicked. I used the word as Mrs. Sheldon would have

used it. Did she not resent, I should have asked, this interference with her arrangements?"

"Of course she resented it; she would have struck me dead, if looks could have done it. But she never questioned my right, nor even my motives.

"'You would not have dared to speak to me like this,' was all she said, 'if you had burned those letters. It is not only women, then, who tell lies.'

"'Nothing that I know—or which I hold in my possession—shall be used to your disadvantage, madam,' replied I respectfully, 'if only you will be ruled by me in this particular matter. If otherwise, it will be my painful duty to place in Mr. Brown's hands a certain note—I think you will remember it——'

"'You coward!' she broke forth. If I had really kept that letter she would have spoken truth; and even as it was, lad, I felt like a whipped cur. Do you understand, now, that I have done something more for you to-day than put on a tall hat?"

"Indeed, indeed I do, Jack," exclaimed Walter, earnestly.

"Yes; but if our positions had been reversed, you feel that you could not have done as much yourself for me?" answered Pelter, bitterly.

"I did not say that, Jack. Good heavens! do you suppose that I am reproaching you for sacrificing (as you said) your self-respect for my sake?"

"Well, this much I must needs say in my own justification: it was not altogether for your sake, Walter. It was for this young girl's sake also, whom I have never seen, except on canvas. If she is as good as she is beautiful, it was my bounden duty to defend her from that most unscrupulous of enemies, a jealous woman."

"Of course, I know Mrs. Sheldon is Lilian's enemy; but why should she be jealous of her?"

"Because Mrs. Sheldon failed where she has succeeded. Did she not fail, man, in winning your smiles down at Penaddon?"

"She surely never told you that, Jack?" cried Walter.

"Certainly not; nor did you either; but yet I knew it. She must either fail or succeed with every man that comes in her way.

Well, this being so, I knew she would stick at nothing in the way of revenge; and, as it happens, interest and vengeance in this case went hand in hand together. She is as poor as a church mouse, as I conjectured, and is playing for a great prize in Mr. Christopher Brown; and could she have hooked the father, it would have gone hard with her step-daughter, you may take my word for it. Even as it is, the poor girl has, in my opinion, a very dangerous relative in her new-found brother-in-law; a Frankenstein, too, you should remember, lad, in some respect of your own creation."

"I know it," groaned Walter, despondingly. "But what can I do? I can't stop Selwyn from going to Italy, as you have

stopped his aunt."

"No; but you can do something else. Your patron at Willowbank has paid you for your picture in advance; thinking, thereby, to close all connexion with you, no doubt. You have the sinews of war, then why not carry it into the enemy's country?"

"Into the enemy's country?" repeated Walter. "I don't quite see what you mean."

"Well, in other words, then, here is a young painter, devoted to his profession, and with a pocket full of money; what is more natural, and right and proper, than that he should wish to visit Italy, the temple of art, the very cradle——"

"By Jove, I'll go!" cried Walter, leaping to his feet.

"Of course, you'll go, though you needn't have interrupted a fellow in what promised to be a very pretty flight of eloquence. I shall miss you, of course, but then I shall feel that you are improving your mind. You must not confine yourself to picture-galleries, remember, but study the out-door effects of nature—the southern skies and seas. They say Sicily is a good place for filling your sketch-book. Suppose you go to Sicily first, and then work your way up from the toe of the boot—""

"My dear Jack, you are the best adviser that ever man had!" cried Walter, with enthusiasm.

"That always seems so when one's advice happens to chime with one's friend's wishes," observed Pelter, composedly. "You must not be too sanguine, however, Sir Knighterrant; it seems to me that you have got your work cut out for you. Even if you should save the young lady from the dragon, it will be a tough job to win her."

"I do not think of winning her," answered Walter, earnestly. "If I can only be of use to her—only let her know, when far from home, and, as she supposes, friendless, that she is not without a friend; if I can unmask this man, and show her doting father what he is——"

"You will ask no other reward," interrupted Pelter, dryly. "That is very wise, and very pretty; but everybody has not your disinterestedness. For myself, I feel that I have earned something at your hands, my lad; and I will thank you to brew me a little whisky-punch in the manner with which you are acquainted, and which the Faculty have recommended for my complaint.





CHAPTER IX.

NEW LODGINGS.

is late October, but where Walter Litton has, for the present, taken up his abode, all nature still wears her summer dress. It is early morning, but the air, though welcome and refreshing, breathes on him soft and warm, as he stands on the balcony in front of his lodgings, and looks out on sea and shore. So different is the scene which morning is wont to present to him, that it verily seems to be another world. In Beech Street. he was fortunate if at such a time the fog permitted him to see the sky. Here, the heavens are smiling on him without a cloud. and the sea reflects their smile on its smooth bosom. Above him, in serene stillness, rise high purple hill-tops, the very names of VOL. II. 10

which he has not yet mastered, and which have still for him that mysterious charm which belongs to mountains which we see, but have not yet trodden. Below, is a broad highway—the Marina—at this hour silent and deserted, but which will later in the day be thronged by equipages vying with that of the Lord Mayor of London for splendour and bad taste. The streets, too, as yet are silent, although life has begun to stir in the alleys that feed them, and in which common shops full of fish, and fruit, and flowers are already open. Out of windows hang to dry things both rare and common; namely, clean linen and macaroni. But at the elevation at which our hero stands, not only do the beauties of nature appeal to his artist-soul with irresistible force, but even what is in reality mean and sordid becomes picturesque. The result is, therefore, a picture that has no flaw, set in a frame of gold and azure. As the morning advances, the gold increases, flowing in, as it were, upon the picture itself; till, presently, he perceives why the tall houses looking seaward are so brown, and also the advantages that may result in some climates from living in an alley, with only a strip of sky to light it. The growing glow and heat, indeed, are such as soon to drive our hero from the balcony into his chamber, a scantily furnished room—as furnished apartments go in England—but wonderfully clean for Palermo; the reason of which can best be explained by an introduction to the proprietor of the house, whose modest knock at the door has already been repeated without arousing the attention of his new tenant, absorbed by the beauties of sea and land.

A small, spare Sicilian, who now enters with the breakfast equipage, Signor Baccari, has, like his house, a half-baked look, which might lead the uncharitable to suppose him averse to the use of water; he was indeed averse, for he was a Sicilian, but for all that he used it, being, as we shall hear, under a vow—though to no saint, for saints always stipulate for dirt—to do so.

"Good-morning, signor. You have slept well, I trust?" said he, in tolerable English.

"If I have not, it was no fault of the arrangements made for my comfort," returned Walter, warmly.

Baccari bowed, and showed his teeth, white as the mice of any organ-grinder of his race.

"To please the friend of one's friend is to please one's self," he answered. "So soon as his letter reached me, said I to my wife: 'Scrub everything—the tables, the chairs, the floors.' It was Signor Pelter's weakness to have everything scrubbed; and the weakness of those we love is to be respected." If Signor Pelter had been dead, and his Sicilian friend had been referring to the fulfilment of his last request, his tone could not have been more grave and pathetic.

"Your good-will is, I am sure, reciprocated," observed Walter, smiling. "When Mr. Pelter found I was resolved to visit Sicily, he said: 'I have one good friend there; if you visit Palermo, ask for Signor Baccari, in the Piazza Marina. I spent a winter at his house in my young days, when I thought I was going to be a Raphael, a Murillo, a Tintoretto—three single gentlemen-artists all rolled into one.' You remember his style?"

"Is it possible to forget it? Heavens, what a genius he had! I have in my little room above-stairs his view of the harbour. It is the place itself! He was ever upon the sea, you know—the deep, smiling,

treacherous sea!" And Signor Baccari crossed himself like lightning, and muttered something that sounded between a curse and a prayer.

"You do not like the salt-water, then, yourself?"

"I! How can you ask me who know what happened? I detest it! I abhor it! I fear it worse than the brigands. What! body of Bacchus! did he never tell you why—he who preserved my Francisco?"

"Never; he only mentioned that you and he were old friends."

"Is it possible? To be sure, he is not one to talk of his good deeds; if so, he would be always talking. And yet, look you, because he is a heretic, there are some who would hold him worse than a brigand. Bah! what stuff.—Forgive me, signor, for spitting on the ground. That was one of his prejudices, and it should have been respected. 'If you must spit, my dear Baccari,' he would say, 'spit in the sea.' He was so droll!"

"But how was it he saved your Francisco?"

"O sir, we were in a boat together-

Francisco, then a little child, my wife and I, all fools for being there—with the signor and a fisherman; out in the next bay to the west, yonder, which is more beautiful than this, folks say, or than the Bay of Naples. But to my wife, with the child in her arms, nothing seemed so beautiful as to watch the reflection of his innocent face in the deep deceitful sea. So, while she was leaning over the boat-side—it is terrible even to tell of it!—the boy leaped out of her arms; there was a little splash, and then all the light of our life was quenched for ever!"

"But your son was not drowned, for I have seen him."

"No; thanks to Santa Rosalia—and a heretic—he was saved. Our friend was with us, brave, agile, and who swims like a fish. Hardly had that little splash faded from our ears—as the knell of a death-bell dies away—when there was a big splash—that was Signor Pelter. O, sir, I shall never forget it—'a header,' he afterwards called it: and he then comes up with the child in his mouth—I mean, in his arms, like a waterdog. It was nothing short of a miracle. What could I say to that hero, who had

thus rescued our darling from the jaws of death? Nothing-nothing that could make him understand my gratitude! 'O what,' cried I, 'noble Englishman, can I ever do for you or yours?' 'Wash, my dear Baccari, wash a little, occasionally, for my sake,' was his reply. Hence it is that our house alone. in all Palermo, is always waterflooded. 'You will die of the damp,' say the neighbours; but we are not dead yet; neither I, nor my wife, nor our good Francisco. Is it wonderful that we have done Signor Pelter's bidding, and are always clean! Is it wonderful, also, that to me the sea is more terrible even than the brigands?"

"Are the brigands, then, so very alarming?" inquired Walter. "I understood that you good folks who dwell in towns, at least were safe from them."

"Safe! Holy Rosalia, nobody is safe!" answered the other, sinking his voice. "It is not safe even for us two to be talking of them. They have spies everywhere; allies everywhere. Why, the Marina, yonder, is the only road in Palermo that a rich man dare take his pleasure upon. On all other

ways—if he goes to Messina, for example—he must take a mounted escort. To think that a couple of miles out and in, is all that a man dare travel, here in Palermo, because of brigands!"

"My dear Mr. Baccari," said Walter, smiling, "it appears to me, since our friend Pelter never even so much as mentioned their existence, that you have got brigands on the brain."

"Pardon, signor; it seems so, doubtless.
—Your breakfast is prepared."

It was evident that the feelings of the little lodging-house keeper had been wounded. In vain, before sitting down to his meal, Walter endeavoured to explain away his unfortunate observation.

"The Signor Litton is mistaken; I am not out of my mind, as he has been pleased to imagine," was all that his apologies could for some time extract from his host. But presently, when Walter had explained to him that in England there were no brigands, absolutely none, and that, therefore, all reference to such unpleasant folks had for him an air of fable, he grew mollified.

"The signor, then, is blest in his country," was his grave observation; after which, he inquired whether it had always been so favoured.

"Well, we had once robbers and outlaws," admitted Walter, "but certainly never in broad day, and in the neighbourhood of our towns. There was Robin Hood, for example, centuries ago, whose band, however, was said to plunder the rich only, and not the poor."

"Ah, but these rogues, they plunder everybody," put in the Sicilian, once more astride upon his hobby: "though it is only when some great man has suffered that the affair is made public. My neighbour here, Loffredo, for example, a man as poor as myself, was taken up the mountain last spring, and had to pay so much for his ransom, that he and his family are beggared."

"I would have let them kill me first!" exclaimed Walter, indignantly.

"Yes, but your wife could not—that is, if she loved you, as in this case. Loffredo refused to pay more than such and such a sum—which would not have utterly im-

poverished him—whereupon one comes down here, into the very next street yonder, and brings something with him. 'Madam,' says he, to Loffredo's wife, 'do you recognise this ear?' They had begun to mutilate the poor fellow; and without doubt he would have died by inches, had she not sold all, and sent the required ransom. Again, in the early morning (for the poor fellow shrinks from showing himself in the crowded streets), you may see any day Signor Spillingo with but one arm, and without a nose. The poor gentleman, captured by these scoundrels, had not the money at command to satisfy them; but his friends scraped together what they could, and sent it to the captain of the band. 'This is not enough ransom for a whole man,' he said, and thereupon reduced him to the pitiable spectacle which I have described. To bring one's children to want, or to lose life and limb, these are the hard alternatives; severe punishments to pay for a walk outside the city walls in spring-time, signor."

The good man's manner was so earnest, so pathetic, that Walter was tempted to observe: "I trust, Signor Baccari, that you

yourself have never suffered from these villains, either in purse or person?"

"Thanks be to Heaven, never! But my Francisco was once taken; he was acting as guide to a French gentleman, and, fortunately, being so small a fish, they made use of him in another way; they sent him into the town to state the price of their captive; when, only think of it, Francisco himself was thrown into prison, upon the charge of treating with brigands! The poor innocent lad! Our rulers, you see, cannot put down these thieves; but when a man is taken by them, they throw obstacles in the way of obtaining his liberty."

Walter could not but acknowledge that this was indeed a pitiable state of affairs, though in his heart he thought his host was unintentionally exaggerating matters. An element of humour also mixed with his compassion for Signor Baccari, whose fate it was to live on an island, where on the one hand the sea was forbidden to him, and on the other the land. It seemed impossible for any man, not absolutely a prisoner, to possess a more limited horizon in the way of movement.

Yet Signor Baccari was by no means dispirited by these peculiar circumstances of his existence; his talk, when it was not upon the Brigand topic, was as gay and lively as the twitter of a bird; no stranger could have had a better guide than he to show him the lions of Palermo, and if Walter had cared for gossip, the private history of every household in the place would have been at his service, for Baccari knew them all. Francisco, his son, a lad of talent, seventeen or eighteen years old, was generally, however, Walter's cicerone. This youth was a study for a painter: tall, slight, and sunburnt, with poetic grace in his every movement, and a certain cold indifferent manner that would have been contemptuous, but for its stateliness; just as when a king's air is cold and apathetic, we call it royal. He had no conversation, but since he could speak no word of English, that was of no consequence to Walter, who, on his part, possessed but a smattering of Italian, and no Sicilian save what he found in his pocket dictionary. Still, the two got on very well together, Francisco's eloquence of gesture doubtless making up for a good deal. But what made him especially valuable to Walter was that, unlike his father, he was passionately attached to the sea, and well skilled in the management of a sailingboat. In vain had Baccari forbidden him, even when little more than a child, to tempt the treacherous smile of the Mediterranean; he had ever taken his greatest pleasure upon it; and now that he was a man—according at least to Sicilian reckoning—he was, in all except the name and the attire (which his father would not permit him to adopt), a sailor.

Litton, too, notwithstanding the attractions which Palermo offered to his artist's eyes, was seldom content to be on shore, nor even in the waters immediately about the harbour. It was daily his practice to take a boat and put to sea; to escape from the landlocked bay, with its sheer steeps, until they seemed to dwindle before the presence of snow-capped Etna—a hundred miles away. The beauty of the scene thus left behind them was so transcendent, that it would sometimes win Walter's gaze and hold it, despite of himself, in a species of enchantment: but for the most part, he would

fix his eyes to westward, where nothing was to be seen for leagues and leagues but the blue sea, and watch for a certain coming sail; while Francisco lay at length, thinking of nothing beyond the orange which he was slowly slicing, as an English school-boy (only without his eagerness) would slice an apple. Ever and anon, Walter would intermit his watch upon the sailless sea, to take from the pocket of his sketch-book a printed extract from a newspaper, which he would read and read again, as though to assure himself that in the end his patience must necessarily be rewarded: "On Wednesday last, from Plymouth, the yacht Sylphide (Christopher Brown, Esquire) for Palermo." The weather had been charming; even the Bay of Biscay must have been tolerably tranquil during the passage of the voyagers, but still the Sylphide came not. It was unreasonable in Walter to be so impatient, for he himself had started from England on the Thursday, by Paris and Marseille, for the same destination, and the iron horse was, of course, an overmatch even for the swift-winged Sylphide. Moreover, she might have touched at Gibraltar, or even at Marseille itself.

But there was still another alternative, the thought of which haunted Walter, blurred all beauties of land and sea to his curious eves, and made him sick at heart. voyage, in place of benefiting Lilian's health, might have injured it; the Sylphide, perchance, might have put back, or, making for some port, its passengers might have disembarked, and gone home by land. Thus, day after day went by in fruitless expectation; his sketch-book, notwithstanding the temptations that on every side appealed to him, remained almost blank; his hand refused its wonted office; it was only by forcing his mind into the shafts, and making that draw, in the shape of acquiring the Sicilian language, that the time could be made to pass for Walter at all. Making every reasonable allowance for probable delays, the yacht was now a fortnight behind her time, when, on a certain evening, just as their own little sailing-boat, far out at sea, had, as usual, put about for home, and Walter, sunk in despondency, was thinking whether it was worth while to remain in Sicily at all, Francisco touched his elbow, and, in his cold indifferent tones, observed: "Inglese sheep." Walter started to his feet, and gazed to westward; there was many a white sail studding the blue deep, as stars the sky, but he noticed no addition to their number.

"There," said Francisco, nodding lazily towards the extreme horizon, where something like a puff of smoke was barely visible; "Inglese yat."

His sharp and practised eye had detected something in the shape of the sail which announced at once her class and nationality.

"Let us put back and meet her," exclaimed Walter eagerly, thinking not of the yacht, but Lilian.

Francisco opened his almond eyes a little, the only expression of wonder he ever allowed himself. "Why so, signor? when with the breeze she must needs be in Palermo before us."

So they held on their course, while the "Inglese yat" fulfilled Francisco's prophecy by gaining on them hand over hand. For the rest of the voyage, Walter had no eyes except for her. What was the flaming glow of sky and sea, compared with that first gleam which glittered on the sail that

brought his Lilian from the under-world! What was the purple tint of evening upon the mountain-sides to the rose-coloured dreams of love! On came the swift yacht, ever nearer and larger, till it overtook their little craft. Walter had no need to read the name that was writ in golden characters upon the bows, to know it was the Sylphide. An instinct seemed to assure him of the presence of the treasure that was being carried past him-of the neighbourhood of her he loved. From under his broad hat he scanned the deck with furtive glance, though indeed there was but small chance of his being recognised. No newspaper had recorded, under the head of "Fashionable Intelligence," Mr. Walter Lytton's departure from Beech Street, Soho, for Sicily. By all on board who knew him, he was thought to be hundreds of leagues away, and by all save one-perhaps even by her—to have given up the object of his life as unattainable. But he was there close at hand, if not to win, at least to watch over and defend his Lilian. She was not on deck; nor did he expect her to be, for the evening air was chill. Sir Reginald alone, 11 VOL. II.

beside the members of the crew, was visible. He was standing in the bows, with a cigar in his mouth, looking intently towards the town, which they were now rapidly approaching. To judge by his frowning brow, his thoughts were far from pleasant ones, but they would have been darker yet had he known that the light bark within but a few feet of him, and on which he did not even waste a glance, carried his whilom friend to the same port.





CHAPTER X.

DANGER.

MONG many things—but all connected with one tender topic—that troubled Walter's mind as his boat followed the English yacht that

his boat followed the English yacht that evening into Palermo harbour, and then lay at a prudent distance from her moorings to mark who should leave her for the shore, was the question of conscience: "Have I a right thus to play the spy?" Here were an English gentleman and his family come abroad for health or pleasure, and was it fitting that they should be dogged and watched by one who, if not a stranger, had forfeited (though certainly through no fault of his own) the right to be considered as a friend of the family. Did not this very necessity for concealment on his part itself

imply a certain meanness? What would be the judgment of any disinterested person upon such underhand proceedings? What must Francisco, for example, think? to whom he had given his orders to keep the boat in the shadow of an Italian steamer that happened to be anchored near the station which the Sylphide had taken up, and consequently afforded a convenient place of espial. Probably Francisco, engaged at that moment upon what was very literally a supper of herbs, which, with some blackish bread, he had just taken out of his pocket, and which had already surrounded his beautiful head, as with a halo, with an atmosphere of garlic, did not think much about it; yet, even in the presence of Francisco, Walter felt ashamed. He remembered a certain argument he had once neld with Jack Pelter upon the subject of anonymous letters, in which he had contended that under no possible circumstances could a right-minded, honest man-far less a gentleman-be justified in writing one. "What! though no other means of redressing wrong, or warning an innocent person of some peril, should suggest itself?" Jack

had inquired; and he had answered: "No; not even in that case."

The surprise he had experienced at hearing his friend express a contrary opinion—for Pelter's nature was, he knew, ingenuous to a fault—had impressed the circumstance upon him, and it now recurred to him with particularity. "Your argument, if pushed to extremity," Jack had replied, "would imply that nothing but straightforward conduct should be used, no matter against whom we may be contending; that in savage warfare, for example, we should employ no subtleties, nor even take advantage of the cover of a tree; and that, against criminals, we should scorn to call to our assistance the arts of the detective."

"The profession of the detective is one authorized by law; but what is called an amateur detective," he had replied, "is one in love with deception for its own sake, and therefore hateful to every honourable mind."

"But if one is persuaded that a crime is about to be committed, it is surely the duty of every man to avert it by such means as lie at his disposal. It is easy indeed to imagine a case—no personal advantage, of course, of our own being involved in the matter—where almost any means would be justifiable."

It was curious enough that an aimless talk, carried on in Beech Street over pipes and beer, should thus recur to him with such force and vividness; but perhaps it may be that no idle word, even spoken in jest, but bears some fruit in this world, as we are told it will do in the other. At all events, Jack's opinions, which, when they were uttered, had failed to convince his opponent, now gave Walter comfort in affording him arguments of self-justification. True, in this case, he had no cause to suspect that any wrong, far less any crime, was about to be committed; yet Lilian's expressed apprehensions, combined with his own estimate of Sir Reginald's character, did give him considerable though vague anxiety on her account, and seemed to afford him at least a colourable pretence for playing this clandestine part of guardian angel. And at all events he could honestly affirm that self-interest in nowise moved him in the matter. It was not to win Lilian for himself that he was acting thus; she seemed as

far out of his reach—and as adorable—as any saint seems to her worshipper; and if sacrilege was threatening her, it was his duty to avert it. It was perhaps fanatical in him to imagine that any such thing was being meditated; but if so, there was no harm done in his keeping watch over her, thus unknown and afar.

As soon as the yacht had come to anchor, he saw Sir Reginald go below, and presently reappear in company with a lady, veiled and cloaked, whom he concluded to be Lady Selwyn. They got into a boat with some luggage, and were rowed ashore, not to the Dogana, as he expected-Sir Reginald was not a man to submit to the inconvenience of a custom-house, if money could ransom him-but at Porta Felice. whence they drove in the direction of the Marina. After their departure, Mr. Christopher Brown came upon deck, and walked slowly up and down with his cigar, enjoying doubtless that first opportunity of a level promenade; but Lilian did not make her appearance. Walter did not wonder that she had not gone ashore with her sister, shrewdly guessing that, after so long a companionship with Sir Reginald, she found his absence more enjoyable than the land; but it did surprise him that on a night so mild and tranquil she did not come on deck to enjoy the glorious panorama that for the first time offered itself to her Saxon eyes. A light in the windows of the stern-cabin served to mark her shrine. It was still so early that it was unlikely she was weary; so therefore she must needs be ill. Yet, in that case, Sir Reginald would surely have procured medical advice; and he did not return.

There seemed nothing to be gained by watching longer, yet Walter remained for hours, long after the owner of the Sylphide had retired below, till the sky grew black, and the stars came out above the mountainpeaks. Then the patient Francisco, duly guerdoned for his long vigil, put him on shore. As he walked towards the Marina, he saw a tall figure standing under the porch of the Hôtel de France, which he once more recognised as the ex-captain of dragoons. Sir Reginald and his wife had established themselves, it seemed, within a few doors of his own lodging.

That night Walter slept but little; his brain was busy with guesses at the cause of Lilian's non-appearance on board the yacht.

In so fair and strange a clime, it seemed so inexplicable that curiosity should not have induced her to come up on deck, unless she was really too unwell to do so. he fell asleep, it was only to have his apprehensions embodied in grotesque and hideous dreams, in which Lilian was always the victim, and the captain her destroyer. the morning his first movement was to the window, from whence he could command but little of the harbour, yet that little comprising something of what his eyes most yearned for-the delicate spars of Inglese vat" standing out against the background of a purple hill. For many an hour yet, it was in the highest degree improbable that Sir Reginald would be stirring; still he resolved to keep within doors, and thereby avoid the risk of recognition. He had somehow persuaded himself that his usefulness if it was fated that he should be of use-to Lilian would be invalidated, should his presence at Palermo become known. As to the fact of his being resident in the town

transpiring by other means, it was not likely that any one should mention the name of so unimportant an individual as himself, who did not even patronize an hotel. At the same time, he thought it as well to secure Signor Baccari's silence upon this point, whose tongue was apt to be eloquent upon all subjects, from the least to the greatest; while his son Francisco, on the other hand, never opened his mouth but to admit a cigarette or a strip of macaroni. As it happened, the master of the house did not put in his usual appearance that morning at Walter's breakfast-table. some business having taken him into the town betimes. Late in the afternoon, however, when the Marina was beginning to fill with equipages, he returned, even more radiant than usual.

"I have news for you," said he to his lodger. "A great Milord has arrived from England, richer than any that has appeared this season. The hotels, it seems, are not good enough for him, for he remains—he, at least, and his daughter—on board of his own ship, which is fitted up like a palace. He is something tremendous; the whole town is talking of him."

"His name?" inquired Walter, amused by this magnificent description of the selfmade merchant.

"His name is Brown: yes—Milord and Milady Brown. Their ship is called the *Sylphide*. You can see a portion of it from the window. It is, I don't know how many tons—perhaps a thousand."

"Scarcely so many as that, Mr. Baccari," said Walter, laughing. "We have seen the whole of it—Francisco and I—last night. We met it coming into harbour. Did he not tell you?"

"He tell? Not he. He is a good son, but he does not talk. I sometimes think that the brigands frightened his voice away when they got hold of him a year or two ago. What a prize Milord Brown would be for those rascals! How they would coin his blood if they got hold of him! He is wise to remain on board ship."

"But they could not hurt him in Palermo, I suppose?"

"No, no; not in the town. But if he should take a fancy for pleasure trips, were it only to ascend Monte Pelegrino, let him have soldiers with him, and plenty of them."

"It seems to me to be a most discreditable thing that you good folks in Palermo should be kept prisoners within your own walls."

"Doubtless it is discreditable; but it is better to be a prisoner than to lose your skin. It is safe enough on the Marina here, driving up and down."

"You are easily satisfied," answered Walter, laughing.

"Yes; contentment is a blessing, signor. I look out" (he was standing at the window), "and see these carriages, and though they are very fine—probably the finest in the world—I say to myself: 'Do not be envious, Baccari. For fivepence you can hire something to carry you up and down, which, though not so highly decorated, serves your purpose equally well.' Ah! there are some new faces—your compatriots, signor—a handsome man, though not so goodnatured-looking as a husband should be, and a charming wife. They form part of the suite of Milord Brown, and are staying at the Hôtel de France. Do you know them?"

"Yes, I know them," answered Walter; who, standing behind his host, could watch.

the passing carriages secure from the observation of their inmates; "but I do not wish to be recognised. You can keep a secret, Signor Baccari?"

"For a friend's friend, yes," replied the little lodging-house keeper theatrically. "The signor does not wish it to be known that he is in the town?"

"Just so. It is important that that gentleman should not know it."

"The gentleman!" answered the other, with a comical look. "I see!"

"I don't want either of them to know it," returned Litton, with a stiffness that was utterly thrown away upon his mercurial companion. "They are not the suite of Milord Brown, as you call him, but members of his family."

Sir Reginald did not certainly resemble a valet—even the finest specimen of a gentleman's gentleman would have suffered by contrast with his haughty and supercilious mien, as he leaned back in the carriage, and stared about him. It was strange how he had lost his once genial smile since the sun of prosperity had risen upon him; perhaps he no longer thought it worth while to wear

it, now he had gained his object—the pale and timid-looking girl that sat beside him, and to whom he seldom vouchsafed a word. The carriage, which had been driven towards the town, did not return up the Marina, and Walter rightly concluded that it was bound for the harbour, and might perhaps come back with Lilian and her father. And so it proved. In less than half an hour the same equipage came slowly up the Marina with two more occupants. Lilian, with her sister, now occupied the front seat; her appearance was greatly altered since he had seen her last; she was not less beautiful than of yore, but her beauty was of another type—that of the hothouse flower; cushion was placed behind her head, and her large eyes, as they turned languidly at her father's voice, looked very weary. Would they have lit up, thought Walter, if she could have known that at that moment she was passing beneath his window; and that his gaze was furtively devouring her? Was it possible that the sea voyage alone could have worked thus harmfully with her? Or was this change not rather owing to irksome companionship, to the knowledge of

the tyranny that was exercised over Lotty, and to the absence of any one who could sympathize and make common cause with her? Nay, might not even the consideration that a certain true-hearted friend (as she, at least, knew him to be), one Walter Litton, was separated from her by wide seas, and probably for ever, have helped to pale that fair cheek, and dull those once bright eyes! As the carriage rolled away, his gaze dared not follow it, for it must needs have met that of Sir Reginald, whose glance shot hither and thither with contemptuous swiftness, unless when spoken to by his father-in-law, when his face at once assumed the air of respectful attention. Walter knew him well enough to feel, not only that he had not schooled himself to such unwonted humility without an object, but that he must also deem the object attainable. Sir Reginald had hated exertion even in his college days, and still more self-denial; but when the prize had seemed of sufficient value, he had gone in for as severe training as any devotee of the oar. He was one of those men who are always saying to themselves (instead of "Is it right?"), "Is it

worth my while?" and who act accordingly. Undoubtedly, however, Walter was thinking hardly of him. It is not to be supposed, even though his looks might show ill-concealed disfavour towards his sister-in-law, that he was speculating upon her indisposition or general delicacy as likely to end in her death, and therefore in his own aggrandizement; it is more probable that he simply disliked her because he knew that she had found him out, and resented his influence with her father. Again, and still again, did the carriage of Milord Brown and family pass Signor Baccari's house, amid an ever-increasing throng of similar vehicles; the crowd of sightseers on foot was also larger than was customary, and among these Walter could see that the new arrivals caused no little excitement. It was not unusual for an English yacht to put into Palermo harbour, but it was evident that some especial interest attached to the proprietor of the Sylphide; whether on account of that report of his vast wealth, which had already reached the ever open ears of Baccari, or from the beauty of his two daughters. Since this was so, since even in

a foreign town, and as an utter stranger, Mr. Christopher Brown and his belongings were of sufficient importance to make such a sensation, was it not the very height of folly in one like himself-an unknown and penniless painter—thought Walter, with a sudden pang, to nourish hopes in connexion with Lilian? He acknowledged to himself that it was so: hope—that is, a lover's hope —was out of the question for him; but that he might be of some service to her, he knew not how, against some danger he knew not what, of that he had still some hope. As if to make up for his absence at his lodger's morning meal, Signor Baccari spread Walter's supper-table that evening with his own hands.

"Well," said he, "you saw all your friends. How beautiful are the young ladies! How prosperous looks Milord! How bold and gallant the young gentleman his son-in-law! He is a soldier, I suppose?"

"Yes, he is a soldier," answered Walter; "a man who has served with great distinction in the war."

"But yet not a favourite of yours, signor?"

"How do you know that?" inquired Walter quickly.

"I merely judged from your countenance—which is Italian in its frankness, rather than English—as he drove by. You would not be discontented, I was about to ask, if ill luck should happen to these compatriots of yours?"

"Ill luck? I don't understand you. Most certainly I wish none of them harm; while, as to some of them, the ladies, for example, I would rather—infinitely rather—that the ill luck, as you call it, no matter how ill it, may be, should happen to myself than to either of them."

"The signor is very gallant," answered the Sicilian, shaking his head. "But no man is prepared to die for more than one woman—at least one woman at a time."

"To die?"

"Yes, signor, even to die—for it may come to that. Listen to me a little." The lodging-house keeper's tones had suddenly become very grave. "You are Signor Pelter's friend, and therefore mine; nay, you are my friend and my son's friend on your own account. Well, you asked me

this morning, could I keep a secret. Let me on my part ask you the same question: Can you?"

"Certainly I can," answered Walter, more astonished by the gravity with which the other put the question, than even by the question itself.

"That is well, since otherwise what I am about to say, would, if repeated, cost me dear. On the Marina this morning, beside the carriage-people and the good company, there were some queer folks, dressed as fine, mayhap, as the rest; but—brigands!"

"Brigands on the Marina; impossible!" The idea appeared to Walter about as incongruous as highwaymen in Rotten Row, or on the West Cliff at Brighton.

"It is nevertheless true, signor. They scent the carcass afar off like vultures, but they are more audacious. They have spies also everywhere. The arrival of Milord Brown reached their ears, no doubt, almost as soon as mine; and they have already identified him?"

"Identified him?"

"Well, yes; in a case like this, where so much is involved, it would not do to make mistakes, you see. Such things do occasionally happen. They have caught the wrong Milord before now. An encounter with the king's troops is not to be hazarded for nothing. These gentry like to be sure of their ground."

"But what have the king's troops to do with Mr. Brown?"

"Well, he would hardly be so rash, I conclude, as to move without an escort. On board his ship he is safe, of course, but in no other place. If you are his friend, you had better let him know as much, that is all."

"But the whole story will appear to him an absurdity. He will ask for the proofs of his danger—for the authority that it exists."

"And that, signor, you have given your honour not to reveal. In confidence, however, the case is this. My Francisco, as I told you, was once taken prisoner by these scoundrels. During his captivity, he learned not a little of their private ways. There is a certain freemasonry among them, by means of which, for example, they recognise each other to be gentlemen of the same profession—the eyes to the left, and a tap of the head, like this. Well, my Francisco

was on the Marina yesterday. He is not a great talker, but he has quick eyes—and he saw something."

"I should like to hear what he saw from his own lips," said Walter quietly, beginning for the first time to believe that the thing was serious. Baccari was not only a gossip, but had a capacious swallow for the marvellous; whereas Francisco's information—the little, that is, he had ever condescended to impart—had always proved to be correct.

"No, signor; I cannot permit that," was the Sicilian's unexpected reply. "I have already gone for your sake and that of friendship's as far as I dare go. My boy must be able to swear by the Virgin that he never breathed to you one syllable of all this. It is he who will be suspected, you understand—not I—if you should think it well to give Milord Brown a warning."

"I see," said Walter thoughtfully.

"Then I am to take it in real earnest, that it is your opinion and Francisco's that the brigands are plotting to seize my friends, with the view of exacting ransom?"

"By Santa Rosalia, so it is. If Captain

Corralli catches them, they will have to pay him handsomely for their lodging."

"Corralli? Then you know the very man, it seems?"

"Not I," answered the other hastily. "I know nothing. Even what I did know is mine no longer; it is yours."

"You have no advice to offer in addition to this meagre information?"

"Advice against the brigands! Heaven forbid. I have said more than I ought to have done already, in stating the bare fact. You must act as it pleases you."





CHAPTER XI.

THE CHASE IN THE CALM.

HE information—if such a hint of danger could be called such-that had thus been given by his host to Walter was indeed astounding, but it was not incredible. Short as was the time he had himself been in Palermo. so many and so extraordinary had been the stories he had heard narrated of the vigour and audacity, as well as of the crimes of the brigands who haunted its very gates, that he was constrained to admit at least the possibility of this new scheme of outrage. His informant, however timid and credulous, had undoubtedly-through his son Francisco-exceptional opportunities of information upon the matter in question; and, moreover, it was pretty evident that he

had not told all he knew. The fact that brigands had been even interchanging signs with one another as the occupants of Mr. Brown's carriage passed by, was itself alarming; but in all likelihood there had been much more of particularity in the affair than Baccari had stated. No captive worth the trouble of taking had as yet fallen into brigand hands that season; and no doubt, like the wolves after long famine, wretches were emboldened by necessity, and more apt even than usual for any daring deed. The wealth of the English merchant had probably been much exaggerated to them, and would afford a tempting bait. The time in which they had acquired even that much of information respecting him was, however, so extremely short, that notwithstanding their employmeet of spies-which was well known to be the case, and who were suspected to exist even in the very hotels at which the proposed victims lodged—it seemed to Walter inexplicable: in his perplexity, he found himself inventing the wildest theories to account for it; among them, even the notion that Sir Reginald himself had had a hand in

the matter crossed his troubled brain. reflection, however, he admitted this idea to be as monstrous as it was unjust; for how could Lotty's husband, even if it could be shown that it was to his advantage to get his relative kidnapped—which it clearly was not, seeing the ransom must eventually come out of his own pocket—have been able, himself, an utter stranger in Palermo, to enter into a nefarious treaty with the brigands of the mountains? The fact of Walter's entertaining such a thought even for an instant was, however, a curious proof of the hostility with which he now regarded his quondam friend—of the profound contempt which he entertained for his character: the reason of which was not so much what he knew of him—though he knew much that was evil as that mistrust of the baronet with which Lilian's instinct had inspired her, and which she had communicated to him. Of Lilian, however, at present, and in connexion with the brigand question, Walter was not thinking; it was rare indeed to find the banditti encumbering themselves with female captives, the possession of whom must needs hinder them from making the rapid marches

which pursuit so often compelled. Nor did he greatly concern himself with the personal safety of Sir Reginald: his anxiety was solely upon Mr. Brown's account; partly because any outrage such as was contemplated would fall on the worthy merchant, being what he was, with especial severity (Walter had not forgotten the hospitality and kindness he had manifested towards him in old days), but principally because of the distress with which such an event must needs afflict his daughters.

What course, however, to adopt, in order to put him on his guard without permitting him, or his, to guess from whom the friendly warning came, was a difficult problem. Any hint directly from himself was out of the question; Walter was firmly resolved—unless an opportunity of doing some great personal service should be vouchsafed him—to keep his proximity to them unknown to any of the party; and moreover, any interference on his part was certain to have a base motive assigned to it by at least one member—and he the most influential—of the family. In a word, either his warning would be disregarded as a mere pretence for

regaining lost favour, or it would be credited at the expense of his own character. It might have been fortunate that he was able to afford them the information, but how should he explain his presence at Palermo, his pursuit of Lilian across the seas! Under the circumstances, he decided to do nothing for the moment, but to keep, through Baccari, a strict watch upon the movements of Sir Reginald at the hotel. It would be by that means easy to find out if the party contemplated any expedition without the town, and in that case he would send them warning of its peril.

It seemed, however, as though Milord Brown and his belongings were well content with such objects of interest as Palermo itself afforded. He and his two daughters were generally to be seen during the fashionable hours driving up and down the Marina, and at other times, when the weather was comparatively cool, visiting the picturesque and ancient churches, or making purchases at the quaint old shops. The two girls were both greatly altered from the day on which the young painter had seen them first, and altered for the worse; but the

change was of a different kind. In Lotty's case, the beauty of youth was dimmed by sorrow and disappointment; her illusions had been rudely destroyed; in her secret heart she doubtless knew that she risked, and almost lost, her place at her father's hearth for an unworthy object; the man that had once been in her eyes a hero, nay, a demi-god, had shrunk down to mean dimensions; her impassioned lover had become a faithless husband, a tyrant too, of whom she stood in fear. Perhaps her happiest moments were those thus passed in the society of those who had once been all in all to her; while he who had usurped their place in her heart—and lost it by his own harshness and infidelity—strolled about the town in his own fashion, and followed his own devices. Lilian too, it was plain, was a sufferer, whether from mental or physical causes, but her beauty seemed enhanced rather than diminished by the sad experience. Languid and listless she might be, but the listlessness and languor were not those of a fine lady; it was the idea of the public that she had come to Palermo as a last chance for strength and life, and pity

and admiration were the tributes paid to her wherever she moved. In reality, though far from well, she was by no means so ill as these good folks supposed her to be, and what ailed her she kept to herself. Lotty's eyes were often red with irrepressible tears; but Lilian shed none, though she mourned in secret the unhappy condition of her sister, and the influence which Sir Reginald exercised over her father. It appeared to Walter, however, who watched the proceedings of the little party with the utmost interest. and as closely as the necessity of keeping himself out of their sight permitted him, that this influence was on the wane. only, as we have said, did Sir Reginald take his pleasure for the most part independently of the rest of the party, but when in company with them the behaviour of the old merchant towards him was far less cordial than of yore; he generally addressed himself to his daughters rather than to his sonin-law, and received the conciliatory speeches of the latter with less outward signs of satisfaction than were due (as one would have thought) to a baronet of the United Kingdom. The cause of this, as Walter

shrewdly suspected, was, that during the close companionship inseparable from life on shipboard, Sir Reginald had revealed more of his true character to the old merchant than he had intended to do, and perhaps than he himself was aware of. Nothing is more agreeable in society, it is said, than "a natural manner;" but then we must make quite sure that our nature is itself agreeable before we exhibit it.

Since Walter's host had been so mysteriously communicative to him respecting the designs of Il Capitano Corralli-as the "principal robber" in those parts was familiarly yet respectfully called—he had been singularly reserved and reticent. Upon that subject, indeed, he was resolute not to speak at all, and perhaps was secretly repentant of having said so much. manner, though always respectful, was no longer effusive; it seemed to say: "Whatever obligations I may have once been under, Signor Litton, to our common friend, it has now been repaid to you by the risk I. have incurred." Walter, taking into consideration the natural timidity of the man,

appreciated the sacrifice that had evidently been made of his peace of mind, but thought the risk ridiculously exaggerated. To an Englishman and a Londoner, like himself, it was hard to believe that the apprehensions of this Sicilian were founded on sober That brigandage existed in the neighbourhood must probably be the case, since every one acknowledged it; the natives even spoke of it with a certain bated breath, and with a tempered indignation which showed that they stood in personal fear. But he had begun to assume that such outrages were no more common than the eruptions of Etna or Vesuvius. He had heard of none taking place, but only legends of their occurrence last year at latest. He himself had occasionally been beyond the confines of the city, without meeting with annoyance; and had climbed a hill or two without coming on any one more lawless or ferocious-looking than a shepherd in sheep-Other visitors, better worth kidskin. napping than a penniless artist like himself, had been equally enterprising—for a certain sense of danger had, he was compelled to confess, been experienced in these expeditions—and had likewise returned to their hotels without molestation.

A fortnight had passed away since his host's warning, and he began to congratulate himself that he had not unnecessarily alarmed the merchant and his family, by communicating it to them in any way, when a circumstance occurred which seemed to put their safety beyond all question. On going to the window one morning to take his usual feast of sky, and sea, and mountain before sitting down to breakfast, the light spars of the *Sylphide* had vanished from their usual position.

"Yes, signor," said the voice of Baccari, as Walter stood staring at the vacant place, while a certain void that seemed to answer to it made itself felt in his quick-beating heart, "I am glad to say your friends are saved, and not at my expense; they have saved themselves—which is always the best way of doing it—by leaving Palermo."

"Do you mean to say that the yacht has sailed?"

"Thanks to the Virgin, yes—for Messina. You don't know what I have

suffered for the sake of Milord Brown, or you would, I hope, look better pleased. Ah, I breathe again. I feel as when I first came on shore after little Francisco fell overboard. You will not catch me meddling with the affairs of other people again, I promise you."

"It does not appear to me that any evil has happened to you—or, indeed, to anybody else—from your communication," remarked Walter drily.

"Happened? No; but it might have happened. Ah, signor, if we could only see the dangers we have escaped, we should have more thankful hearts! Even now, I dare not tell you all. Let it suffice-still between ourselves—that Milord Brown has been dogged day and night; they have been so hungry after him, that I almost wonder they did not pounce upon him on the Marina. Half Palermo has been in Captain Corralli's pay for the last fortnight. They would have seized him at the very shrine of Santa Rosalia, if he had but ventured up Pelegrino. But as it is, he has disappointed everybody—that is, I mean all the wicked people. Milord is not only very rich, but very wise; he has taken himself off by sea to Messina. Look! yonder is his fine ship."

And truly at that moment the white sails of the English yacht, set to catch every breath of the light Mediterranean breeze, could be seen rounding the harbour point.

"And have all his family gone with him?" inquired Walter, by no means in the tone of triumph with which his companion spoke. A sickening feeling of desertion, of loneliness, as well as hopelessness, had taken possession of him. His labour had been in vain; he had crossed the seas without being of any service to Lilian, nor had she even been aware of his faithful presence. He required no acknowledgment of his devotion, yet that what he had done should not be known—might never be known—to its object, seemed a hard fate.

"No, signor, not all the family; his sonin-law and married daughter are still at the hotel, intending, I believe, to follow Milord to-morrow by the steamer. But what does that signify to Corralli—even if he caught him, since the big fish has got through the meshes—since he has lost Milord!"

This reference to Captain Corralli's disappointment was thrown away upon Walter; his mind had dissevered itself from all his Sicilian surroundings, and was busy with Lilian only and her affairs. Since she and her father had sailed alone, it was clear that their relations with the captain had not grown more cordial; but could she be happier on that account, when she must needs picture to herself poor Lotty bearing the brunt of Sir Reginald's ill-temper, increased by the sense of his having thus mismanaged matters? It was a satisfaction, of course, to reflect that the worthy merchant had escaped all danger from the brigands, but now that he had done so, that danger appeared even less to Walter than before. He even confessed to himself that he would have preferred Mr. Brown to run what little risk there might have been by remaining at Palermo. As for him (Walter), there he must stay, his solitude made more irksome than before by Lilian's flying visit, for it was impossible that he could follow her to Messina by the steamer which was to convey Sir Reginald and his wife; and of public conveyances by land—thanks to the

fear of Captain Corralli and Co.—there were none.

For weeks Walter's art had been in abeyance; the pre-occupation of his mind, in spite of the novelty and splendour of the scenes that presented themselves to his gaze, had kept it so; and now it seemed utterly impossible that he could take up either brush or pencil. He envied the Sicilian nature which permitted those about him to find happiness in listless ease, to loll in the sunshine, to dream away an aimless It was not the climate that existence. enervated him, and made him disinclined even for the labour which had once been his delight, but sheer despondency; hope, the lamp of life, that shines with so bright a flame in youth, with so feeble a flicker in old age, was burning low within him; and in that land of light and colour all seemed All day he sat unoccupied at the window, from which he had watched the Sylphide slowly glide to eastward, gazing on the glaring empty street, on the gay Marina, with its glittering throng of carriages, and then on the calm evening sea. "Why, the signor has never touched his

dinner!" expostulated Baccari, coming in to see his lodger, as his custom was upon his return from his favourite café.

"I was not hungry," answered Walter quietly.

"How unfortunate, upon the very day when there was so fine a fish! Francisco caught it himself this morning."

"Is your son within doors?"

"Yes, indeed; he fancies he has earned a holiday because of that mere stroke of good luck; and has been doing nothing—positively nothing—throughout the day." The good man, who never stirred a finger in the way of work himself, beyond bringing in Walter's meals, denounced this idleness with amazing energy.

"Send the lad to me," said Walter; and accordingly Francisco presented himself, rubbing his fine almond eyes, and looking listless and languid from head to heel.

"Could we go for a sail, my boy?" inquired Walter wistfully.

"We can go on the water, if the signer wishes it," replied the other, with a glance at the glassy sea; "but there is not a breath of wind." "Has there been no wind all day?"

- "None since the morning; Milord's yat" (he had learned a little English, and was very proud of that word and his pronunciation of it) "had a little with her, but it soon came to nothing."
- "The Sylphide has not got far you think, then?"
 - "Not ten miles away, if so much."

"Could we overtake her?" exclaimed Walter suddenly.

"Well, that depends; there is a little breeze from the shore, though none out yonder; and by hugging the land it would be possible for so small a boat as ours to make some way, perhaps."

"But we could use the oars."

Francisco shook his head. "The signor would find that very toilsome," he answered; the idea of taking an oar himself not even so much as occurring to his imagination.

"At all events, let us go," said Walter. The poor young fellow was seized with an uncontrollable desire to have a last farewell look—not at Lilian, for that would be impossible, but—at the yacht that was bear-

ing her away from him. In twenty minutes the two were on board their boat. It was a tiny craft, that would have succumbed to a Levanter-or even half a one-in five minutes, but its lightness was now of advantage to them. The gentle breath that sighed from the great island-garden swelled its small sail, though, as Francisco had prognosticated, it failed them when even a little way from land. They therefore coasted along the shore, following its myriad indentations, and coming face to face with a thousand unexpected beauties, which, under any other circumstances, would have ravished the young painter's eye. Presently the moon arose, and touched all these objects with an unearthly splendour.

"It is late," observed Francisco sententiously.

"Where?" asked Walter eagerly.

"I said it was late, signor."

"I thought you said: 'There is the yacht.'"

"No; she may have got half way to Messina by this time. The wind may have held with her, though it dropped with us; and let me tell you, it will be harder work getting home than coming."

"Let us round the next headland, and if nothing is to be seen of her then we will put back."

Francisco, at the tiller, raises his shoulders half an inch, his eyebrows a whole one, and lights another cigarette. This Englishman, who seems to be in love with a "yat," is incomprehensible to him, but he is generous, and deserves to be humoured. As they round the promontory he has indicated, an immense reach of sea comes into view, but not a sail is to be seen upon it.

"The 'yat' must be five-and-twenty miles to eastward of us, signor, if she——"

"There she is!" interrupted Walter eagerly. His quick eyes had detected her to the right of them, almost close in shore.

"What can this mean?" muttered Francisco, a gleam of interest crossing his dark features. "There must be something wrong here."

"Wrong? Why so? She looks safe enough."

"Ships do not ride at anchor with all

their sails set, signor. See! she is drifting this way and that; she has no steersman!"

"The man must have gone to sleep; let us make haste to warn them," cried Walter, nervously seizing the light oars.

A few minutes brought the boat within hailing distance of the *Sylphide*, for such she undoubtedly was. Not a soul was to be seen upon her deck, but a light was gleaming in the stern-cabin. Though she carried a crowd of canvas—every stitch she had, indeed, was set—her progress was very slow; but what there was of it was erratic: she seemed like a ship in a dream.

"In ten minutes she would have been on shore," observed Francisco.

"But in such a night as this there could have been no danger?" urged Walter, alarmed even at the supposititious peril from which their opportune arrival was about to preserve his Lilian.

"Perhaps not," said Francisco sententiously, steering straight for the vessel. As they neared her, he stood up and scrutinized her narrowly from stem to stern. The unaccustomed excitement in his face aroused in Walter an indefinite anxiety.

"What is it that you fear, Francisco? Nothing can surely have happened to the crew—to the passengers?"

"I know not what to think, signor. Shall we go on board?"

Walter hesitated: the occasion was certainly sufficiently momentous to excuse such a step; but he shrank from thrusting his presence on those to whom it would be so utterly unexpected, so unexplainable, and—in the case of Mr. Brown, at all events—so unwelcome.

"Let us row round her first," said he; and they did so. Not a sound was heard save the dip of their own oars: not a living being was to be seen. The Sylphide's boat was fastened at her stern, so it was plain that the crew could not have left the vessel by that means. They pushed between it and the yacht, so that Walter, as he stood up, could look right into the window of the stern-cabin. A lighted lamp swung from the roof of it, and made all things visible within it, but it had no tenant. From no other window or porthole was there sight or sound of life; the

exterior of the hull above the water-line exhibited no trace of damage; no appearance of any collision with ship or rock made itself apparent anywhere.

The yacht was empty.





CHAPTER XII.

TO THE RESCUE.

longer discomposed by any apprehensions of the nature of his reception, since it was clear the vessel was tenantless, Walter yet hesitated to set foot on her deck. Some spectacle—he knew not what-might be awaiting him in that silent ship, which it was better for him to die than see. He had read, in history or romance, of Sallee rovers-pirates of the Mediterranean—and the wild fancy struck him, and chilled his blood, that some catastrophe might have happened to-to those on board (he did not dare say, even to himself, to Lilian), such as had been common half a century ago, though even then not close to the shores of Sicily. The idea was monstrous; but the fact before them-a ship in full sail, but empty, with her boat towing at her stern—was monstrous too, and not to be explained on reasonable grounds. While he still stood sick at heart, half resolved, half disinclined to know the worst, Francisco settled the matter for him. "She will be ashore in five minutes, signor," he cried, "if we do not drop her anchor." And with that he sprang on board, and Walter followed to assist him. The lad's gestures were eloquence itself, and besides by this time Walter had acquired some considerable knowledge of the island tongue.

Having succeeded in bringing the yacht to a standstill, the two young men proceeded to make a thorough investigation of her. The deck was clean, and the neat coils of rope were in their proper places, showing no traces of any struggle. The brassbound steps that led to the little saloon, and the brass rails beside them, shone bright in the pale moonlight, and bespoke the latest and most scrupulous care. On the table were the remains of a luxurious dessert, with wine and glasses—one of the latter of which was broken. A knife was lying beside the fragments of it on the floor. Of the three

chairs that had been so lately occupied, one was also overturned. Besides these, there were no traces of disorder. The door, however, at the extremity of this apartment showed traces of having been battered in. It opened into the stern-cabin which they had already examined through the window, and which had evidently been used as the ladies' boudoir. An harmonium stood open with a music-book upon it; and on a sewingmachine was a small phial containing oil, and standing in an upright position. then Lilian had sat, and worked, and played but, at most, a few hours ago, and until the moment when some mysterious fate befell herself and all the other occupants of the little vessel. The broken panels of the door were an indisputable proof of violence, but from whose hands, was a question as unanswerable as ever. On board an English yacht upon a pleasure-cruise, the idea of mutiny was not to be entertained for a moment; moreover, the ship's boat would have been used by the mutineers to get to land. The attack then, if attack there had been, must needs have come from without. Judging from what they saw, the resistance

must have been small, which, considering that the crew consisted of four British sailors beside the captain, was unlikely to have been the case, unless the thing had been effected by surprise. No other cabin showed any signs of hurry of departure on the part of its inmates; but in Lilian's own little bower-Walter entered it with a sensation of sacrilege—the door of a species of wardrobe stood wide open, as though some article—probably a shawl or cloak, of which there were several on its shelves—had been snatched from it in haste. Save the above indications, all below-stairs was just as it might have been in Palermo harbour. Upon deck, however, a second examination revealed some blood-stains close to the tiller. which marked the place perhaps where the steersman had been struck down by some unseen or unexpected foe.

"Great Heaven! there has been murder done!" murmured Walter hoarsely. Was it possible that the butchery had been wholesale, and that the bodies of the victims had been cast into the sea? His knees trembled, and a sharp spasm shot across his heart at this frightful thought, which was, however, dismissed almost as soon as entertained. Strong men fighting for their lives, even though unarmed and taken by surprise, would have left more evidences of their cruel fate than this. Indeed, save for that one bloody token, it was difficult to believe that any act of violence could have been committed, so neat and orderly was the ship, so peaceful the fair scene in which it lay. The dark-blue sea was without a ripple, save where the broad silver pathway of the moon made inequalities on its surface visible; the shore, close to which they were, was fringed with orchards, and the mountain sides beyond were richly cultivated.

"Francisco," exclaimed Walter, "for Heaven's sake speak a word to me, or I shall go mad! What has happened? What can have happened? This is your own land—not mine. I feel like one in a hideous dream, where all is unreal and monstrous. Have you any explanation of this frightful thing to offer? Have you any hope to give me? if not, at least tell me your fears."

Francisco looked furtively towards the shore, and laid a finger on his lips. "Yes,

signor, I think I know what has happened," answered he in his soft musical tones. "Come down here into the cabin: there is no knowing who may be watching us up here, or whose sharp ears may be listening."

"Well, well, what is it?" inquired Walter impatiently, when they had descended the stairs. "You would never look like that if my friends had been murdered, surely."

"O no, signor; there has been no murder," answered Francisco quietly-"that is, unless there was some absolute necessity for it. Milord and the signora in any case are safe; I will stake my life on that. Look you, the 'yat' was becalmed and close in shore; and these gentlemen of the mountains-

"What! the brigands?"

"Hush! Yes; they doubtless came out in boats, and captured her by surprise."

"But who ever heard of brigands turning pirates?"

"No one, signor, up to this moment; but the circumstances, you must allow, were very uncommon. Milord's departure was a most serious disappointment for them.

They took it—it is no wonder—much to heart, and clung to hope to the last. They had scouts all along the shore, or perhaps they watched the vessel from their own woods up yonder, and descended when the opportunity offered. I don't know that it was so, but to me, who am acquainted with the captain, it seems probable."

- "The captain! What captain?"
- "Corralli."

"Great Heaven! Do you think then that my countrymen have become his captives?"

Head, eyes, and fingers all combined in giving a most unmistakable "I do."

- "But the signora?"
- "She is doubtless in his hands, but only for the present. He will send her back, since the troops will be called out, and she would impede his flight. But he will keep Milord."
- "They will not injure the young lady in any way?" asked Walter imploringly, as though it had been in Francisco's power to prevent them.
- "Certainly not. There are women in the band: the captain's sister, Joanna, is always

with him, and has power; the signora will doubtless be placed under her protection."

Walter shuddered. How horrible was the idea of Lilian needing such a chaperon! How horrible, and how incongruous! Could he be really talking about the same girl whom he had seen surrounded with the conventional attributes of wealth in London; serene and quiet in her garden at Willowbank; gracious at her father's table; and whom he had last met among that commonplace crowd in the garden of Regent's Park! And now it was more than probable that she was held captive by a lawless bandit among yonder hills! The very means by which he had become acquainted with the fact—the little Sicilian dictionary he held in his hand, and without which half of Francisco's communication would have been lost upon him-was an element in this incongruity, and helped to give a grotesqueness which, however, was very far from being laughable, to this mysterious drama.

Walter had listened to his companion's words with enforced attention, but now that the information had been obtained—now that he had something to go upon—he

became all impatience for action. Every moment in which he was not engaged in promoting Lilian's release seemed a waste of time, and a reproach to his loving heart. "Our best plan, I conclude," said he hastily, "is at once to return to Palermo, and give notice of what has occurred to the police."

"To the police? O no, signor."

"To the soldiers, then?"

"Nay; that would be worse still. Your best hope to see Milord again is to communicate with—his banker."

Walter was astounded; it seemed to him that Francisco was humouring British prejudices in making a commercial transaction out of this abominable outrage.

 disappointed of a plot he has so long calculated upon, he will be capable—it is idle to deny it—of any atrocity."

"But how shall I know what is the sum demanded?"

"There is no fear upon that point," answered Francisco, smiling. "To-morrow, or the next day—as soon as he considers himself in safety, Corralli will send in his terms."

"But in the meanwhile we are losing precious time," broke in Walter impatiently. "If we were in Palermo now, for example, a pursuit might be organized, and these brigands forced to give up their prey."

"It would be the height of imprudence, even then, signor," replied Francisco confidently; "but we are not in Palermo, nor could we sail there in this calm under six hours at quickest."

"But we could go by land in half that time."

"The signor can go, if he wishes it," was the stolid reply. "For myself, I have seen Captain Corralli face to face already; I do not desire another interview. It is true he may be in the mountains by this time; but his people are everywhere, and on the road to Palermo to-night, above all places—you may be sure of it—to intercept this very news."

A look of contempt came into Walter's face, but instantly died away. This lad had good reason to shun the brigands, whether his fears on this occasion were well grounded or not. He was not in love with Lilian, nor interested in saving the money of Mr. Christopher Brown. It was unreasonable therefore to despise him—who, moreover, had a father who loved him as the apple of his eye—for refusing to risk life and liberty on such an errand.

"Francisco," said Walter gently, "take you the boat at once back to Palermo, and give information of what has occurred, if I have not already done so. Should you not find me at home, go straight to Sir Reginald Selwyn, at the Hôtel de France, and tell him what has happened. And now put me ashore."

Unmistakable compassion looked softly out of Francisco's eyes. "The way is long," he said—"twelve miles at the very least; and it is doubtful whether

at any village the signor will find a conveyance."

"No matter; I can run the distance in three hours. The road goes by the coast, does it not, and cannot be mistaken?"

"The road is straight enough, but——Is the signor quite determined?"

They had reached the deck by this time, and Walter's only answer was to step into the boat which was fastened alongside the yacht. The muffled dip of the oars alone broke the silence of sea and shore; the hills, the woods, seemed steeped in slumber; through the orchard trees the white road could be seen empty and silent.

"Keep in the centre," whispered Francisco, pointing towards it, "and do not stop for a shot or two. They do not shoot well, flying, these gentlemen. But if they once capture you, make no attempt to escape, or they will kill you to a certainty—that is a point of honour with them.

Here the boat touched land, and Walter leaped lightly upon the shore."

"Good-bye, Francisco, till to-morrow morning," said he cheerfully. "I shall beat you by three hours, for a ducat." "Good-bye, signor; and may the blessed saints protect you from all harm."

The next moment the boat had shot into the bay, and Walter was pushing his way through the little orchard that lay between the sea and the high road.





CHAPTER XIII.

ON THE ROAD.

APID motion of any sort is detri-

mental to human thought, and especially that of one's own legs. As Walter's feet beat quickly on the hard road, something seemed also to beat within his brain; the ideas in it were jostled together, and if one of them got uppermost for a brief space, it was soon usurped by another. At first, fear was dominant—fear, not upon his own account at all; when a man is hopeless he feels no fear. If Lilian had ever been within his reach, or even if

she had promised herself to him in the case, however improbable, of her father giving consent to their union, life would have been inexpressibly dear to Walter, and he would have shrunk from losing it. As it was, Captain Corralli, or any other gentleman of his calling, was welcome to it, or seemed to be so. So far as he was personally concerned, it was a pleasure to be thus risking it for her sweet sake; it was but a poor thing, and scarcely to be counted as a sacrifice; but it might be valuable just now to her, and therefore it behoved him to preserve it. He looked therefore sharply to right and left, and kept the middle of the road, as Francisco had advised him to do.

On the left was always rising ground, which by degrees reached mountain height, with its summit but rarely visible; on the right were sometimes orchards, or cultivated plots of ground, and sometimes only the There was no sign of life on any hand. There is nothing so wearisome as indolence, and hence the Sicilian retires early; still the evidence of man's labour convinced him that he could not be very far from some village, or at least a human habi-When one is running, one's aspirations are limited, and to find an inn with a horse in its stable was the summit of Walter's ambition for the present; that would enable him the more quickly to reach Selwyn,

whom for the last fortnight it had been his constant endeavour to avoid. Everything in the world is by comparison - which accounts perhaps for so much of it being odious-and what had been his bane he now longed for. The embarrassment, the humiliation, which such a meeting would cost him, the imputations which it would necessarily lay him under-all these had sunk out of sight, and left Lilian's deliverance alone visible. He was not much moved by Francisco's arguments against employing force in the matter; the lad had doubtless inherited some timidity from his father, and his own captivity by the brigands, when he was but a boy, had given him probably an undue impression of their courage and tenacity of purpose. thought that if the Government would only send out troops enough, the scoundrels must soon be surrounded, and compelled to deliver up their prisoners. In the meantime, it was their interest to treat them well; and, thank Heaven, the night was warm and dry, and Lilian, delicate though she was, might take no harm from her temporary captivity. It was impossible, at

the rate he was going—though he took care not to press the pace too much, since it might be necessary at any moment to "put on a spurt"-to look below the surface of things; moreover, it was above all things essential to keep a sharp eye on the road. Though using as much caution as he could, his footsteps rang out in the silence, and must needs give notice of his approach to any one on the watch. Presently he heard another sound from the hilly ground which was in that part covered with scrub—low trees with a thick undergrowth; a sharp hissing or kissing noise. He stopped a moment to listen, and it was repeated farther on, and therefore less clearly. It might very well proceed from some bird, or even insect, with the nature of which he was unacquainted; yet it startled him, and he mechanically increased his speed, keeping more to the orchard side of the road. In this he erred, for at that moment a man clothed in sheepskin, and with a gun in his hand, sprang out from it, exclaiming something which was probably an equivalent for the old British "Stand, sir!"

Walter had been an idle man at college,

but had learned something from an outside professor, who taught Self-defence, and especially the useful art of hitting out quickly from the shoulder. No sooner had this wolf in sheep's clothing thus addressed him, than seizing the barrel of his gun with one hand, he knocked him down with the other. At the same moment the low wall on the other side of the road became a parapet for gun-barrels-one, two, three, four; he could count them as they shone dull and cold in the moonlight; and again the warning cry, "Stand, sir!" rang out, as it seemed, from half a dozen mouths. Walter's reply was to bound forward like an antelope. "They do not shoot well, flying, these gentlemen," were the words that rang in his ears mingled with a storm of bullets. One of them stung his cheek, and he could feel the hot blood running down it: but it only acted like a spur. Never, even when he carried off "the Pewter" in the university flat-race two years (it seemed two centuries) ago, had he ever laid foot to ground so nimbly. Perhaps the guns came from Birmingham, but in any case they were not breech-loaders nor double-barrelled;

they had advanced all the leaden arguments they had to urge, and he had got clean away for that time, at all events; only what troubled him was that that soft sibilant noise—even at that supreme moment it struck him how like it was to kissing—was repeated, and repeated again, far, far in front of him, as though the whole hillside had been tenanted by ardent lovers. He guessed rightly—though the fact was not revealed to him just then—that it was the system of telegraphy used by the brigands.

This attempt to intercept him had been made within a few hundred yards of a large village, which a turn of the road now revealed to him. The houses were of tolerable size, and mostly built of stone; and since in every case the shutters were closed, and the absence of glass in the windows was not observable, the place looked as well to do as any petty provincial town in England. Walter took it as a matter of course that herein he would find succour and sympathy, even if he should be unable to procure a vehicle to carry him the remainder of his journey. But either the inhabitants were unanimous in their habits of early retire-

ment, or what, after a few applications with his fist at a door or two, he began to think the likelier, the noise of the brigands' guns had induced them to shrink into their shells. and simulate slumber. Not a single reply did he extract in answer to his repeated summons, till he reached the principal inn, where, in an upstairs window, a light was Here the master of the still burning. establishment was so good as to come out to him in person, appearing in a large white cap, in which he might either have been cooking or sleeping, and but little else in the way of garments. There was no meat in the house, he observed with great volubility, and without giving Walter time to name his wants; nothing indeed to eat but macaroni. If the signor did not require food, so much the better; but seeing him to be an Englishman, his mind had naturally flown to meat.

"Have you no eyes?" interrupted Walter impatiently. "Can you not see that my cheek is bleeding? I have just been way-laid by brigands."

"Heavens! Is it possible? Brigands?"
"It is quite possible, as one would have

thought you could believe, since it happened just outside your town. However, I want nothing from you but the means of getting away from it. I must have a carriage of some kind, in which to get to Palermo. These scoundrels have captured an English lady and her father, and every moment is precious. Just give me a basin and some water, while the horses are being harnessed."

Walter would not even enter the house, but stood at the door while he washed his wound, which turned out to be little more than a scratch.

"Now, when is that carriage coming round?"

He had seen one in the yard that adjoined the inn.

"You are welcome to the carriage, signor, but, alas! we have no horses, nor do I believe that there is one in the place. Two gentlemen have just stopped here with a tired pair from Termini, which we were unable to replace."

"From Termini? Why, that is the way I have come! Did they not meet any molestation?"

"No indeed, signor," answered the inn-

keeper with a smile of incredulity, that seemed to say: Young gentlemen get scratches from other things beside musketballs. "They certainly did not mention that they had been shot at."

"Well, I have been shot at," observed Walter with irritation; "and I must get on to Palermo—those two things are certain."

That his host was indisposed to offer him any assistance, and anxious to get rid of him, there was no doubt; and what Baccari had told him of the fear inspired in the villages by the brigands, convinced Walter of the reason.

"You do not seem very hospitable, my friend," said he severely; "and I shall make it my business, when I reach my journey's end, to let the police know how you have treated me. Where there is a carriage for hire, there are mostly horses——"

"There are none here," interrupted the landlord sullenly; "but if the signor can make good use of his legs, he cannot fail to catch the vehicle of which I have spoken, since the road is hilly, and it can scarcely move out of a footpace."

The suggestion was not inviting; but as there seemed no alternative, Walter turned upon his heel, with an exclamation which, being in pure Saxon, let us hope the innkeeper imagined to be a farewell blessing, and recommenced his journey. He had recovered his breath, and felt altogether "like running." If any Sicilian eyes were watching him through the closed shutters, as he moved lightly up the street, they would have seen what was probably a rarity to them—an English athlete in "good form." For boxing, though he could, as we have seen, give a well-delivered blow enough, Walter's frame was too slightly made; but for speed and endurance few amateurs could touch him. He ran "clean," without that "loppety" motion from which even professional runners are seldom free; and he knew how to husband his resources, while appearing to be putting forth his utmost If the village landlord had told powers. him the truth—a very improbable "if," it must be confessed, in any case, and, moreover, his words had had to Walter's ear a tone not only of sarcasm, but of malignity he had little doubt of getting a lift on his

way—of overtaking this carriage with two tired horses upon a hilly road; and even if there was no carriage, he was game to keep up his present pace to the gates of Palermo. The road, though it turned inland, was now much more open; he could see not only around him but before him; and presently he beheld, just disappearing at the top of a steep hill, some slow-moving vehicle. What description of conveyance it was he had not time to make out; but the sight of it gave wings to his feet. Even if it was but a laden cart, he might bribe the driver to let him take the horse out of it, and thereby reach the city half an hour earlier. top of the hill a most splendid spectacle awaited him: the whole Bay of Palermo, even to Cape di Gallo, lay stretched beneath his gaze; the full height of Mount Pelegrino stood up black, except where the moonlight crowned it with silver; while before him was a defile winding between woods or spruce fir, through which, crossed by a stone bridge, leaped down white water to the sea. What delighted him most, however, was the sight of a waggonette and pair, with two men in it, which had just passed

the bridge, and was making its way up the opposite hill. As he ran down towards it at the top of his speed, he fancied he heard once again the sibilant kissing noise run, like some light substance that rapidly catches fire, along the firs upon the left hand: but it might well have been the noise in his ears produced by his rapid progress; and at all events, with help so near, there was no occasion for giving attention to it. The occupants of the carriage seemed to have heard it too, for, to his great joy, he saw it stop, and one man stood up in it, as if to look behind. Walter had no breath to waste in calling, but he drew out his white handkerchief as he ran on, to attract attention; and in this it seemed he had succeeded, for he saw the man making gestures to him, and in a few minutes more he found himself panting and exhausted by the door of the waggonette.

Two Sicilians, not of the upper ranks, as it seemed to him, though they were somewhat profusely decorated with chains and jewellery, were its occupants, and he who had been standing up addressed him in courteous tones.

"Do you want a lift, signor?" inquired he.

"Indeed, I do," said Walter, not waiting for a more formal invitation, but at once climbing up into the nearest seat. "I am pursued and in trouble. Pray tell your coachman to drive on, and I will tell you all as we go along."

At a word from the man who had addressed him, the driver touched the horses with his whip, and off they went, though at a rate so slow, that a London cabman taken by the hour would have been ashamed of it.

While Walter was recovering his breath, he took an observation of his companions. The general impression which his first hurried glance had given him of their "dressy" appearance was more than confirmed; if they had been Londoners, he would have set them down as belonging to the swell mob, or rather they were more like the representatives of that class in farces. They wore billycock hats, rather taller in the crown than those commonly seen in England; shooting-jackets of a burnt sienna colour—so it seemed by the moonlight—with enormous pockets both inside and out,

such as poachers and gamekeepers use. So far their dress was "quiet" enough; but their waistcoats, which were of blue cloth, were covered with gilt buttons, sewn on like those of pages, not for use, but show, and positively festooned with gold (or gilt) To the shooting-jackets were attached a sort of hood, to throw over the head in case of rain; and round each man's waist was a broad belt, with a shot or cartridge pouch depending from it. Under the seat opposite to Walter was a long gun, and he conjectured rightly that its fellow lay beneath him. Upon the whole he came to the conclusion that these men were small tradespeople, who had gone out for a holiday, in which sport-or what they thought to be so-had formed a principal feature. They had probably been shooting tomtits

"If you could get your coachman to drive a little quicker," said Walter, "I should feel more comfortable while telling you my story; first, because it is of the utmost importance to me to get to Palermo as soon as possible; secondly, because, as I believe, we are upon dangerous ground." "Dangerous ground!" laughed he who seemed to take the lead as a superior mind. "When did that come into your head, Signor Inglese?"

"I am perfectly serious, gentlemen," said Walter gravely; "and not only did the circumstance happen which I have described, but a whole band of these rascals have boarded an English gentleman's boat in the bay over yonder, and carried both himself and his daughter into captivity. My object is to give the alarm as soon as possible, that measures may be taken for their release."

"Naturally," answered he who sat on the same seat with Walter, "if the Englishman is a person of consequence, they will send the king's troops after him immediately."

"Just so: that is the plan I hope will be adopted. But in the meantime, I repeat, I wish we could move a little faster. I would gladly bear the whole expense of the waggonette, if I might be allowed to have my way in this particular."

"That is impossible, Signor Inglese," answered the other with a courteous inclination of his head. "We are proud to be

able to do you this small service. And as for brigands, there are none so near Palermo as this—I do assure you."

"And yet I could almost swear I heard them signalling to one another not five minutes ago, down there," argued Walter, pointing towards the bridge. "It was a cry like this;" and he proceeded to imitate it, not, it must be confessed, with great success. The attempt, however, excited the boisterous mirth of his companions.

"The signor must have heard the nightingales," said one.

"Or the echo of his last parting from his mistress must have been still ringing in his ears," observed the other. "As for the brigands, what have we to fear, who carry guns? Would the signor like to take one for himself?" and he motioned to that which lay under the opposite seat.

Nothing loth to be armed in case of the worst, Walter stooped down to pick up the gun, when a heavy weight fell violently upon his shoulders, and he found himself face foremost upon the floor of the vehicle. He struggled violently to free himself; but the space was too confined for him to throw

off the man who had leaped upon him; and in less than a minute his confederate had attached a rope to his outstretched wrists, and fastened them firmly behind his back. When he was suffered to rise the carriage had stopped, and the steps were already let down behind.

"Scende," said one of his captors sententiously.

"Coachman," cried Walter, "you will bear witness what these men have done, and where they did it; they are brigands——"

Here something cold touched the tip of Walter's ear: it was the muzzle of a pistol. "If the signor speaks again he dies," said the voice that had addressed him so often. It was still quiet, and even courteous, but very firm.

Walter called to mind Francisco's advice about submission should he fall into brigands' hands, and was silent. It was not likely, where deeds were impossible, that words should avail him. The driver too, it was now plain, was either in league with these men, or was afraid to oppose their wishes in any respect; he had never once

turned round so as to show his face, and now he drove away, with the same precaution, leaving his three fares in the road. Walter had seen no more of him from first to last than Geoffrey Crayon, Gent., saw of the fat traveller. Ere the noise of the departing vehicle had died away, one of his late companions put his thumb and forefinger to his lips, and whistling shrilly, produced the identical sound which had that night so often created his suspicions. It was at once replied to from the adjoining spruce woods in half a dozen places, and as many men sprung out, each with a gun in his hand, and approached Walter and his captors.

"Your name?" inquired the man who had taken the lead in the waggonette, while the others stood round in an attitude of respectful attention. "Who are you?"

"My name is Walter Litton; my profession, that of a painter; I am an English subject. To what money I have about me you are welcome; and I swear that I will never give evidence against you, if you will only let me go free. Otherwise, this outrage will not pass unpunished."

"The young cock crows loudly," observed the other laughing.

"Well, signor, you have told me your name, and now I will tell you mine. If you have heard it before, it will teach you what to expect, and how idle are all these ridiculous menaces. If you have not heard it you will soon come to know me—I am Il Capitano Corralli."





CHAPTER XIV.

OUTDOOR LODGINGS.



ALTER LITTON had great courage; but a cold chill swept for an instant across his heart

when he found into whose power he had fallen. A hundred stories of the cruelty of the brigand chief, which he had heard while in Palermo, not only from Baccari, but many others—for among the poorer class this man's crimes were the favourite topic of talk—and which he had disbelieved and laughed at, now returned to him with terrible force. There was a house in the town where the chin and grey beard of an old man were shown, which Corralli had sent in to his family as a token that he would "not be trifled with," which was his phrase when a victim either could not or would not pay the

price that had been fixed upon as his ransom. Up to this moment Walter had discredited that ghastly trophy—which was on exhibition for money—but he did not feel so sceptical A rich man was comparatively safe from death and torture; it was the poor whom Corralli persisted in believing rich who suffered, and Walter himself was poor. Those upon whose account he had fallen into this trap were sure to be released (as he concluded), as soon as the extent of their captor's demands was known; but for him there was no such surety. All the moneyat all events, all the available money—he had in the world was some seventy or eighty pounds, at present in his lodgings at Palermo. He had no credit at any banker's, nor was he known to a single influential person. The precautions he had taken to conceal himself were like to bear bitter fruit indeed. It was only too probable that he would be butchered up in yonder mountains, without so much as a single fellow-countryman being aware of his sad fate. Even if Sir Reginald-the only man who could at present help himwere informed of his danger, it was doubtful if he would stir in the matter; doubtful. even whether he would ever let Lilian know that, for her sake, he had suffered captivity and death. Once again Walter gazed—but with what infinitely greater interest than before—upon his late companion in the waggonette, upon his present master, and disposer of his life and fortunes. He was a man of middle size, and quite young, perhaps thirty at the most; fair for a Sicilian, and by no means ill-looking: he had blue eyes, not soft, as eyes of that colour mostly are, but stern and steel-like; he had a long and curling beard, which he was now stroking irresolutely with his dirty but bejewelled hand.

"Your wrists will be unbound, Signor Inglese," said he, in courteous tones, "because we have to make a rapid march, but you will be none the more free on that account. On the first symptom of an attempt to escape, or to speak with any whom we may chance to meet, you will be shot through the head. I never speak twice upon this point, so lay my words to heart. You can run, I know, but not so fast as a bullet flies. Santoro, Colletta!" At these words two of the tallest of the

band came forward. "You have heard what I say, and are answerable for this gentleman's safety." The two men ranged themselves one upon each side of Walter, and at the same time the rope was cut that bound his wrists. Then Corralli pointed to the mountain before them, and said "Forward!"

Bonds to the free man are what dependence is to the noble mind; other outragesa blow or an insult-rouse indignation, audacity; but not these: they render their victim apathetic, hopeless. No sooner did Walter find himself master of his own wrists, than he felt another man againhimself; and therefore he at once began to think of others. Perhaps he was going to be taken to Lilian—to share her captivity; it might be even to show himself of use to her, notwithstanding his apparent forlorn condition. This put new blood in his veins. A broad ditch intervened between the copse into which they were about to enter and the road; the brigands began to scramble through it; but Walter took it in a bound, then, fortunately for himself, halted on the other side. A couple of sharp clicks informed him that his guard had cocked their guns.

"Do not waste your energies, young man," exclaimed Corralli in a cynical tone; "you will require all your strength before

you reach home to-night."

At the time Walter did not attach much meaning to these words; the ease with which he had outstripped his pursuers after leaving the boat, and the inability of his present companions to leap the ditch, gave him no very high idea of brigand agility; but what they wanted in spring and swiftness, he soon found out was more than compensated for by their powers of en-Their rate of progress, though durance. not very rapid, had something of "that long gallop, which can tire the hound's deep hate and hunter's fire," which is the attribute of the wolf; they never halted, nor seemed to require rest or breath. On and on they pushed, through woods, through fields, and presently up the sides of the mountain; and though they often looked behind them and about them, it was without any abatement of their speed. Walter was, to begin with, at a great disadvantage as to physical exer-

tion, since he had had no sleep, whereas the brigands rest in the day, and only move, unless closely pursued, at night time. was too proud, however, especially after what the captain had said, to own himself fatigued, and he hurried on with the rest without a word. But how, thought he, had it been possible for these men-or rather their confederates, for if belonging to the same band, they could hardly have been the same individuals—to carry off Christopher Brown and his delicate daughter? It was torture to him to think what hardships she must have undergone, if the circumstances of her capture had been in any way similar to his own. Had Corralli himself been present at it? he wondered; for that well might be, since his carriage had been coming from the direction of the yacht; and if so, to whose guardianship had she been now deputed? Upon such a matter it was idle to ask any questions, and it might also be injudicious. His best plan seemed to be to remain silent, and to acquire all the information he could by observation.

Throughout that rapid march he beheld but two individuals, shepherds in sheepskin, but each with a species of greatcoat furnished with a capote, like those worn by the brigands. He was hurried rapidly by them; nor did they so much as look up as he passed, being probably as anxious to avoid recognition from him as his captors were to keep him from their sight. The whole circumstances of the case were evidently as well understood on one side as on the other. This incident took place when they had almost reached the top of the mountain, by which time Walter was quite exhausted, as much by famine as fatigue, for he had eaten nothing since he left Palermo in the early evening.

At last the spot was arrived at which Corralli had intimated from the road three hours ago. It was in many respects admirably fitted for a brigand camp, for not only was it the highest ground in those parts, so that the whole country lay like a map around it, but it sloped down steeply into woods on all sides, so that retreat and concealment were made easy. There was a level plateau of turf upon the summit, with just enough trees to screen its tenants from the observation of those below. The pano-

rama was magnificent, and ranged from the snow-capped top of Etna on the one hand, to Palermo and the sea upon the other. Santoro, a man with thoughtful features, that would have been handsome but for a deep scar that ploughed one side of his face, pointed out the view to his prisoner with great politeness, just as an English host might draw a guest's attention to his home landscape.

"It is beautiful, is it not?" said he. "As the signor is a painter, he will appreciate it."

"There are three things, my friend, that interfere with my admiration of it," replied Walter: "I am cold, I am hungry, and I want to go to sleep."

Santoro checked off these wants upon his fingers, then exclaimed: "Canelli."

The youngest brigand of the band answered to this name: he had, as afterwards appeared, joined it but a few days ago, having killed a man in a quarrel, and was employed for the present as their fag and errand-boy. He was not sixteen, but as tall as the tallest of his companions, and his sharp olive face had a fierce hunted look, like that of a wild beast at bay.

"Food and a capote," said Santoro, and pointed to the forest from which they had just emerged. It seemed to Walter as though he might just as well have demanded a carriage-and-four, so far as any likelihood of his wishes being fulfilled was concerned; but without a word of question, the lad darted like an arrow down the steep, and in a few minutes returned with a complete sheepskin, in the hood of which, as in a basket, were a huge hunch of brown bread and a piece of clotted cream (called raccolta). The bread was bitter, and the cream sour, but Walter enjoyed both amazingly, rather to the disapproval, as it seemed to him, of The fact was, as he his two attendants. subsequently discovered, they argued from his relish of this sort of food, which even they were aware was far from choice, that he had not been accustomed to dainties, and was probably therefore by no means rich; and the conclusion they drew, as it turned out, was not without its advantage to him. As a general rule, it took thirtysix hours of life in the mountains (which means semi-starvation) to bring a rich prisoner down to raccolta. The capote was very grateful to Walter, to whose limbs the night breeze upon the hill-top came piercingly cold; but at the same time, to one who is not born a brigand, a stolen greatcoat is not so acceptable as stolen kisses are said to be.

"I am afraid," said he, "Santoro, that this coat was taken from one of those poor shepherds whom we met as we came through the wood."

"It was bought, signor, at a just price," answered the other with some haughtiness. "It is not brigand custom to rob the poor. There are few shepherds who are not willing to sell their capotes for thirty ducats."

"Thirty ducats!" exclaimed Walter, thinking five pounds for a sheepskin rather dear. "Do you mean to say you gave all that money?"

"Certainly; that is, upon your account, signor. It is merely an item added to the ransom you will have to pay. The captain will settle that little matter with you to-morrow. The bread and cream cost only a ducat."

"It seems to me that your hotel bills on the mountain are a little extravagant," remarked Walter.

"That is true, signor, as to the pro-

visions," answered the other naïvely; "but then, consider you pay nothing for your sleeping accommodation. Here is a dry place out of the wind."

Walter threw himself down, and the two brigands followed his example, lying so close to him that he could not move a limb without their observing it. At first this was far from displeasing to him, since their proximity helped to warm him; but presently he became aware that brigands do not use eau-de-Cologne-nor even common water. The keen air was, in fact, powerless to purify the atmosphere of that al-fresco dormitory, in which some twenty men were his com-The four sentinels, two at each end of the little avenue of trees that fringed the hill-top, who kept watchful guard over all, seemed to have had their orders to admit not even the ventilation.

Corralli, with two or three of the band, had withdrawn elsewhere, but a perfect discipline was maintained in his absence. Every two hours these sentries were relieved by others, who, in addition to their guns and knives, were furnished with field-glasses, with which they swept the distant

roads and fields. Not a movement of theirs was lost on Walter, who in vain endeavoured to sleep. Those about him seemed to sink into slumber as soon as their limbs touched the ground. The watchful sentinel became an inanimate lump before the man who had succeeded to his post had paced three times his narrow beat. Conscience might make cowards of these men, but it certainly did not interfere with their repose: the young homicide, who lay on the other side of Colletta, breathed as softly as a child. Not only were all Walter's conventional notions of morality outraged and upset, but the strange and unexpected circumstances of his position rendered his mind a tumultuous sea of thought; retrospect, reflection, and expectation were all jumbled together. Now he was with Jack Pelter, speculating upon the fate of a new picture; now with Lotty, an unwilling witness to her husband's tyranny and coldness; now at Mr. Brown's table, listening to his early struggles after fourpenny-pieces; now watching the yacht as it yawed and drifted without its helmsman; now praying the brigand chief upon his knees to release Lilian, and now clutch-

ing him by the throat in fierce revenge because she was dying on his hands. Of all the scenes that floated before his mind, plucked from the past or present, or suggested by the future, she was either the central figure, or they gradually dispersed, and left her in the frameless space. Where was she? How was she being treated? Was she ailing? Was she gone? were questions he asked himself a thousand times, but to which there could be no reply. Nothing was clear to him but the tree-tops against the moonlit sky, and the slow-pacing forms of the brigand sentinels. The astounding change that had befallen him-the sense that he was no longer a free agent, but that his very life was at the mercy of a reckless robber-confused his judgment. Above all, since nothing was within his own control, he could make no plans to succour either himself or others; he was not even a portion of a machine, like a soldier in warfare; not even a waif upon the sea, which at least has tides and the winds, whose direction can to some extent be calculated. He could not make even a guess at the thoughts that lay beneath the broad hat of Captain Corralli, who had obtained the sole dominion over him, and by whose gracious forbearance he was for the present permitted to draw breath. And so he lay unrestful, till the stilly dawn began to glow upon the mountain-peaks, and birds and beasts and creeping things began to awake to the liberty that was denied to him.





CHAPTER XV.

THE CAPTAIN AND HIS CAPTIVE.

NLESS brigands are pursued, they are not apt to be in a hurry, any more than other fine gentlemen who have time to spare, and no wretched mechanical profession; and the morning was far advanced before the camp on the hill-top began to bestir itself, and think of This was a great advantage to breakfast. Walter, who had fallen asleep at last under the warm rays of the sun, and was dreaming that Mr. Christopher Brown was his father-in-law, a relationship which involved even still more satisfactory conditions of existence. When he awoke, he found Il Capitano Corralli sitting on the ground at his feet, with pens, ink, and paper placed on the turf before him, and with quite a business-like expression of countenance.

"I have a little matter to arrange with you, signor," said the captain affably; "it will only demand a scratch of your pen."

"What! before breakfast?" inquired Walter jocosely, for he had already discovered that it was well to fall in with brigand humour.

"As you please," replied the other.
"Boy!" He made some gesture signifying food, and the youthful homicide was beside them in an instant with a cabbage—apparently frost-bitten—some garlic, and a sausage, black, and of an intense hardness. There did not happen to be any bread in the encampment, and the coffee was represented by some melted snow, which had been found in a sort of natural ice-house on the hill-top. Walter's teeth were excellent, his appetite keen, and, moreover, he wished to appear much at his ease and without apprehension. The captain watched the sausage disappear with a gloomy brow.

"You take matters easy, signor," said he softly; "doubtless you are pretty confident of soon returning to your friends."

"I have no friends to return to, in this country, Captain Corralli," answered Walter frankly; "but as to my cheerfulness, there is a proverb that a man with empty pockets is not cast down by falling among thieves."

"That may be so in England, signor," returned the captain gravely; "but with us brigands it is different: when we cannot take a man's purse, we take his skin. Now listen, and be sure you do not tell me a lie. At what hotel are you staying in Palermo?"

"At no hotel; I cannot afford their charges. I have been residing for the last few weeks at Signor Baccari's on the Marina."

"A very good house," remarked the captain.

"That is as people think."

"Oh, doubtless you are accustomed to much better lodgings in England, where they give large sums to artists for pictures. You live on the fat of the land and sleep on down—there is no doubt of that."

"I am sorry to say you are mistaken, captain. It is possible that some day I may win a name and command good prices for my handiwork, but at present I am ill off

enough; I have not even what every Englishman of property possesses when he comes abroad—a banker. You may find out that for yourself. All the available cash I have in the world is in a table-drawer of my bedroom at Signor Baccari's. It is about eighty pounds—not five hundred ducats."

"Bah!" answered the captain incredulously. "You are down here"—he pointed to the paper—"for three thousand; and I seldom make a mistake in my valuations. This is the place for your signature."

"I cannot sign what I have not read," said Walter quietly.

A very ugly look indeed crossed the captain's face, a look that gave an insight into the nature of the man, between which and his prisoner's eyes had hitherto been kept up a screen of courtesy and affected good-humour. "Do you know," he began, in a harsh grating voice, "that you are just the sort of person one sometimes burns alive? Well, read it."

Walter took the paper, on which was written in a sprawling hand a few words of Sicilian so ill spelled that he found it very difficult to discover in his pocket dictionary for what they were intended:—

"I am in the hands of Corralli: he requires three thousand ducats for my ransom, which if not sent within a few days I shall be in danger. The sum must be paid in gold, and in such a manner as you shall be informed of. If my life is dear to you, hasten this."

"I have no objection to sign the paper," observed Walter calmly; "but I give you my word that I have not this money, nor any means of procuring it."

The captain smiled incredulously as he put the pen in his hand, and Walter wrote

his signature in the place indicated.

"You told me you had no friends among your fellow-countrymen here, signor; had you not better reconsider that statement? Do not lie to me twice—it is sometimes for the second lie that I shoot a man."

"I am not in the habit of lying, Captain Corralli," answered Walter firmly. "I told you I had no friends 'to return to,' and that is true. There are four English persons in Sicily with whom I am acquainted; but as it happens they are not even aware of my having left London. You can verify this for yourself if you have a mind; for two of them are, I believe, in your custody. When I was taken up by your carriage on the road yonder, I told you as much."

"I thought you might have forgotten it," said the other coldly. "It is not every one who has so good a memory about trifles. It is unfortunate that half your acquaintances should be in the same boat as yourself. Now for the other half. Who are they?"

"I am acquainted with Sir Reginald Selwyn and his wife, who are at present stopping at the Hôtel de France on the Marina, but who go to-day by the steamer to Messina."

"Not they," said the captain, smiling. "However, this looks like truth. I should have been sorry to have had to kill a lad like you. It was touch-and-go, though, let me tell you; for my temper is but short, and I was getting angry. Well then, instead of addressing this little note to your landlord, it will go to Sir Reginald Selwyn; he is rich, and will never let a fellow-

countryman be put under ground before his time for the sake of three thousand ducats."

"Captain Corralli," cried Walter earnestly, as the brigand stooped down to write, "I adjure you not to do that. This gentleman, although he is acquainted with me, is not my friend; nay, worse—he is my enemy. I would rather die—if death must be the alternative—than make appeal to such a man."

"How droll!" exclaimed the brigand coldly, finishing the address. "You would rather be shot than ask a favour, would you? Well, I have nothing to do with these fine feelings, you see; though, at the same time, I admire them. This English Milord will perhaps pay for you out of spite, and in order to put you under a humiliating obligation. I am sorry, but I have only to look to my own interests and that of my comrades."

"He will not pay one ducat for me," said Walter confidently.

"Then I shall be still more sorry for myself, and also for you. This is no child's play, signor, that I am proposing," added he, with sudden ferocity. "I will have your gold, or your blood. I mean it. This letter

will reach Palermo before sunset; and if within ten days——"

"Look yonder, captain; the soldiers!"

It was the sentinel who spoke, and at the same time handed his field-glass to Corralli.

The high road on which Walter had been captured on the previous night, could be seen winding like a narrow ribbon at their feet, though at a great distance; in one part of it could now be beheld, with the naked eye, certain small dark masses moving, like ants upon the march.

The next instant, Walter was thrown violently to the ground, face foremost.

"Do not stir, or you are a dead man," whispered a stern voice, that of his guard Colletta, in his ear. All the other tenants of the encampment had prostrated themselves; those who were near the edge of the hill were talking rapidly to their companions, probably giving them notice of what was passing; but they spoke in some sort of argot, which, for Walter, had no meaning. The others answered with oaths and curses. No one seemed alarmed, but every one transported with fury. Even Santoro—the

mildest of the gang—looked towards his captive menacingly.

"If your Englishman has done this, sir," cried Corralli, white with passion, and pointing to the troops, "you are right, indeed, to deem him your enemy; for if harm should come of it, he has signed your death-warrant and that of others also. I have never yet shot a woman, but there is no knowing to what one may not be forced."

Walter knew that this wretch was referring to Lilian, and his heart sank low within him. Was it possible that Heaven could permit such a deed? But, alas, were there not martyrdoms in the world now as of old; tyrannies, oppressions of the gentle by the strong; sufferings of the innocent, inexplicable to the believers in dominant Good! If such a horror should take place, Walter felt that he should have but one thing to pray for—to be one minute alone with her murderer, that he might pluck him limb from limb with his hands. At the very thought, the rage of a wild beast possessed him, his teeth met together, and stuck fast, his eyes became too large for their sockets,

his fingers crooked themselves like the talons of a bird.

"If your gentleman moves, Santoro," observed the captain grimly, to whom such indications of passion were probably not unfamiliar, "blow his brains out."

These ebullitions of bad feeling on the part of the brigands manifested themselves, for the most part, within a very short space of time, and lasted only so long as the cause of them-namely, the soldiers-remained As these latter pursued their eastward march, and disappeared along the road, the general excitement became allayed. The troops were obviously not in sufficient force to surround the mountain (even if they had known the position of their enemies), so as to cut off the band from their supplies, and this was the only danger the brigands really dreaded. Those who were not on guard proceeded with their morning meal, or, having finished it, began to gamble. the game was, Walter could not quite determine: it seemed a sort of "odd and even" of the simplest kind, but the stakes were considerable-indeed, there was nothing played for under gold coin-and the voices

and temper of the players were at least as high as their stakes. Every moment Walter expected to see knives out and blood drawn, but the dispute never went beyond big words and black looks. Corralli alonethough, as he afterwards showed himself, a most desperate gambler—took no part in their amusements, nor gave any signs of returning good-humour. He was for ever turning his field-glass in the direction which the troops had taken, although it was scarcely possible, by reason of the configuration of the country, that they should again come into view. Walter acquitted him of any apprehensions upon his own account, and rightly concluded that his anxiety was excited for the safety of the other portion of the band, in whose custody were his more valuable prisoners. Impeded by Lilian's company, it was probable, notwithstanding some hours of "start," that they had not attained a position so safe and advantageous as the camp upon the hill, which, indeed, had not been reached without great toil and trouble.

Presently, after long and apparently deep cogitation, the captain shut his glass, and

joined the throng of revellers. His brown face, if no longer smiling, had at least lost its scowl; and the voice that could be so short and fierce, was once more courteous in its tone as he addressed his prisoner: "You know this English milord and his daughter, it seems?" he said.

"I am acquainted with them, although, as I told you, they are not even aware of my presence in this country."

"You must have a deep regard for them, however, to run twelve miles of road, in order (as you foolishly imagined) to bring them succour by calling out the troops."

"I have a deep regard for them, Captain Corralli."

"Which involves your knowing their private circumstances," observed the captain quickly.

"Not so. I know of course, that Mr. Brown—he is no milord at all, but a plain merchant—is a wealthy man; but as to the actual extent of his means, I can say nothing."

"Or will not, eh?" replied the other incredulously. "You are an obstinate lad; but I have known others equally deter-

mined, whose mouths I have found means to open. Otherwise," he added with a terrible look, "when a man will not speak, I cut out his tongue."

"I am quite aware I am in your power," said Walter calmly; "but I can only tell what I know."

After a long pause: "What is a ship such as the *Sylphide* worth?" asked Corralli abruptly.

"I am a landsman, and can give you no information on that head for certain," replied Walter. "Perhaps twelve thousand ducats."

"The income of a man who keeps such a vessel for his amusement must therefore be very large—ten times that sum at least."

"It is very unlikely. There are not many men, even in England, who possess such a fortune as that."

"If a man gives that sum for a pleasureboat, what would he give, think you, for a ransom for his daughter?" asked Corralli slowly.

"He would give all he had to spare, no doubt, so long as she was alive: but if you kill her—it is no matter whether by accident

or design; so delicate a creature might perish of one night's exposure to the cold——" A shadow flitted across Corralli's face; and Walter felt that the arrow he had aimed at a venture had gone home. "I say, if she died upon your hands, not only would such an atrocity raise every man's hand against you, mine for one—yes, I say, in that case you had better kill me also, Captain Corralli, for should any evil happen to her" (the picture thus drawn by his own imagination of Lilian's possible fate was too much for Walter's patience; rage had got the better of diplomacy), "I swear to Heaven I would never rest till I had avenged it."

"Let us confine ourselves to business, Signor Litton," answered the captain coolly. "Emotions are out of place here; and as for the luxury of revenge, that is not for captives, but for him who holds them at his mercy. We were speaking of Milord Brown and the ransom."

"Yes; I was about to say that if his daughter's health should give way, by reason of this rough mode of life, you would miss your mark, besides raising the whole country against you. Existence would not

be worth purchasing to the old man, if you once deprived him of his child."

"You think it would be killing the goose with the golden egg, do you?" said Corralli thoughtfully. "Perhaps you are right. It is better to look at these matters from all sides. I suppose this young lady, being so rich, has had a first-rate education; knows foreign languages—Italian, for example?"

"I believe so. She told me on one occasion that she had studied it."

"And her father?" This question was put with an indifferent air, but Walter noticed that the captain's eyes here regarded him with particular intensity.

"I should think Mr. Brown knew little of Italian—much less of Sicilian. Indeed, I may positively state that he is unacquainted with any tongue beside his own."

The captain frowned, and looked perplexed. "Corbara!" cried he, after a minute's thought, and beckoned to the man who acted as his lieutenant. This was an ill-looking, stunted fellow, with a bull neck, and arms as long as those of an ape. He had been unlucky at his "odd and even,"

and, as he rose sullenly to his feet, cast a look at Walter, as though he would have liked to make his prisoner's skin pay for his own ill-The captain and this worthy conferred for several minutes in low tones, the former pointing once or twice to eastward, in the direction of the sea, and then Corralli, taking his gun from the place where the arms where stacked, went down the hill alone. Whither he was gone, or on what errand, Walter, of course, could only guess, but he felt pretty certain that his departure was connected with Lilian and her father. The questioning to which he had just been subjected gave him extreme anxiety, for why should the captain have inquired as to Lilian's knowledge of Italian (since he had certainly been in her company), unless she were too ill to speak? Would he have been so moved, too, by Walter's hint at the delicacy of her constitution, unless she had already shown some signs of its giving way? As to his inquiries about the old merchant, it was probable that Corralli had suspected him of pretending ignorance of the language, in order to avoid debate upon his ransom. Upon the whole, was it not likely that he (Walter) should be employed as an interpreter between the brigands and his captives? Even in the evil case in which he stood, he felt his heart beat high at the thought of his seeing these companions in misfortune. If he could only be of use to Lilian—if his late advice should in the end obtain her freedom—it would not seem so hard to die.





CHAPTER XVI.

BRIGAND DISCIPLINE.

T is only the old to whom "the clouds return after the rain," to whom misfortune is but the prelude to misfortune, and no sunshine illumines the interval; with the young, the sun is always shining, ready to take advantage of the passing cloud, or to pierce through its less heavy folds, even as it intervenes. Within one hour of Corralli's departure, Walter Litton had his sketch-book out, and was pencilling the picturesque surroundings of his prison, not without some sense of pleasure in the employment. Curiously enough, the brigands had robbed him of nothing, but only convinced themselves that he carried no weapons of offence. He knew that this forbearance was not usual with

them, that, in ordinary cases, his watch and chain would have at once been added to the profuse adornments of his captors' persons; and that this had not been done, gave him additional disquiet, for it showed that Corralli and Co. were bent upon some great coup, in which all minor considerations were merged, as of no account. That this project could not be connected with himself alone. was certain: for even if the amount which the chief had set his ransom at could be forthcoming, it was but a small sum, as ransoms went; and, indeed, that would have been only another reason why they would have taken all they could. He had an idea, too, that, considering their slender expectations from his capture, he had been treated with unusual tenderness and consideration. However, now that he was at work with his pencil, all these reflections were in abeyance; he was only thinking what a fine model Colletta would have made in Beech Street, where he could not have shifted his position three times a minute, as he was now doing, as he leaned up against a pine tree and watched the gamblers. He was a magnificent fellow, with a long pointed beard, and,

except for an expression of interest now lighting up his soft black eyes, as the gold clinked, might have been elder brother to Francisco. He was by far the tallest of the band, and probably, except Corbara, the most physically powerful; but he had a delicate skin, and that was why he kept rubbing himself, as cattle do, and I believe for a similar reason, against the pine. It would have been a satisfaction to Walter, had he not been in their immediate neighbourhood, to reflect that all these scoundrels were overrun with fleas, and worse.

"It is wonderful!" said a musical voice (redolent of garlic) beside him; "I have seen nothing like it since I beheld the altarpiece at Termini."

The speaker was Santoro, who, peering over his shoulder, was regarding his little sketch with a look of intense admiration. Walter did not think very much of provincial altar-pieces in Sicily (judging from what he had seen of those in its metropolis), but this natural incense was acceptable, nevertheless.

"It would be better worth your attention if your friend would stand still," said Walter,

smiling. "Why does he not join the game, like the others?"

"We are forbidden—he and I—to do so."

"Oh, I see; for fear I should give you the slip."

"Yes, signor; you see" (this apologetically) "one is obliged to obey orders. Would it be asking too much, when you have done with Colletta, if you would do a picture of me?"

"By all means," answered Walter goodnaturedly. "Never mind Colletta; if you will stand quiet, or better still, sit down, I will do it at once."

"I must trouble the signor to sit down also," replied the other hesitatingly. "You see, one is obliged——"

His sense of duty struggling with the desire to conciliate, was most amusing to behold; nor did it escape Walter's quick eye, that, in taking up his position, the brigand took care to present his face in profile, so that the scar which disfigured one-half of it was scarcely to be discerned.

"This portrait is for your lady-love, I presume?" said Walter.

"Yes, signor; for Lavocca," answered the

other, in grave low tones, and with an uneasy glance over his shoulder at his companions.

"And who is Lavocca?" asked Walter, not so much from curiosity as in order to secure a good sitter; he had now guessed the reason of Santoro's exceptional reserve and silence—for when they were not absolutely menaced with danger, the brigands, as a rule, were as noisy as boys just let loose from school; this gentleman was consumed by the tender passion.

"Lavocca is the attendant of Joanna, signor, and her dearest friend."

"And who— Hold your head a little less stiffly, my good fellow." Here the thought struck Walter, that the last person whom his pencil had sketched—alas, how different, and under what different circumstances!—was Lilian, and somehow the reflection made him feel a kindliness for this poor sufferer, charged with the task of shooting him, if he ran a yard, and yet, who had tender hopes of his own, with perhaps as slender chances of their fulfilment as himself. "And who is Joanna?"

Santoro opened his dark eyes to their full

stretch. The question was evidently as extraordinary to him as though some benighted being, on hearing mention of the Pope, had inquired: "And who is the Pope?"

"Joanna—surely the signor must have heard—is the captain's sister; the hand-somest woman I ever saw—save one; but——" Here he threw his hands up,

instead of finishing the sentence.

"Ah, with a devil of a temper, I suppose?" said Walter. "Some handsome women are troubled in that way."

His tone was careless, but in reality he had become greatly interested; for, from what Francisco had told him about this woman, it was probable that Lilian herself might at this moment be in her custody.

"Temper, yes. Why, the captain himself is at times afraid of her. How Lavocca can put up with it, astonishes me; but she says her mistress has a good heart; indeed, she is both kind and generous; and there is no doubt that she has been cruelly tried. When one is young, and things go hard with one, that makes the blood run wrong for the rest of one's life, you see."

"It is too likely, Santoro. But would you mind telling me her story?"

"Lavocca's story, signor?" inquired the other with simplicity, and a blush upon his dishonest cheek.

"No, no; I would not venture to be so inquisitive. I wish to hear about Joanna, and this captain of yours, of whom everybody knows the history it seems but myself."

"Well, the captain—though you would never imagine it from his grand airs—was at one time but a poor farm-servant. Much intercourse with gentlemen such as yourself, and even great milords, who have been his guests from time to time, as well as his own high position"—here the brigand drew himself up, as though he too, if not the rose (which in the literal sense he was most certainly not), was near the rose—"have made him what he is; but at nineteen he was just a farmer's boy, such as one may meet any day in the fields down yonder, except that he had a noble soul."

"That is a fine thing to have," observed Walter drily.

"True, signor; it makes one independent of everything: a man who possesses it is a vol. II.

king, and knows himself equal to kings. Whereupon it came about that Rocco Corralli fell in love with his master's daughter. He was not to blame for that, you will allow; if he had been of the same rank, nobody would have blamed him; but as it was, complexities arose. The brothers of the girl fell upon him with their knives, and left him for dead."

"What! merely for being smitten by their sister's charms? Is it not possible that they may have led him into some imprudence?"

"Perhaps," returned Santoro, with a judicial air; "it must be confessed that that has been said. His body was taken into the church to be left till morning; but in the night he revived, and dragged himself to the mountains, where there were some fine fellows like ourselves, who received him gladly. Among us there is a field for merit, and the best man is nearly certain to come uppermost."

"Corbara, for example," said Walter slily.

"Do you think yourself a worse man than Corbara, or less fit to govern? I am quite sure Layocca does not."

"Well, well; of course everything is not perfect even up in the mountains! Please Heaven, Corbara will be shot some day, and it will be better for such as you, signor, when it happens."

"Corbara is a brute, I suppose?" observed Walter carelessly.

"Yes, indeed; or if he is a man, he has no heart. He would always rather have blood than ransom. As for me, I have no cause to love him, since I owe him this," and he touched the scar that furrowed his left cheek from eye to chin. "It was a fair fight enough—we had a duel—but then one can't forget such things."

"And yet you must obey him, or men like him," said Walter softly, "and be a witness to his vile brutalities. Now, supposing it were possible that I could procure your pardon, as well as fill your pockets——"

"It is useless, signor," interrupted the other coldly; "such propositions have been made to me before to-day. You are about to propose some scheme of escape."

"No, indeed; I have no such intention: I merely wished to know if the opportunity

of living another sort of life—with Lavocca—should offer itself to you——"

"It never will, it never can. Thousand devils! why should we talk of such matters?" broke in the brigand impatiently. were speaking of Corralli. Well, in course of time he became captain of the band. It was not in that year, nor in the next, but however long it was, he had not forgotten upon the mountain what had happened down yonder. One Sunday morning, when the folks were all in the village church in which he had been left for dead, he descended with his men and surrounded it. The congregation were made to file before him. Two of the brothers of Carmina (that was the girl's name) were among them; those he slew with his own hand, and three others who had crouched behind the altar were shot down. Then he went to the house of his old master, and stabbed him to the heart, and carried off the girl with him into the mountains."

"What an infernal monster!" ejaculated Walter.

The brigand shrugged his shoulders. "It was unfortunate that the family were so

numerous, but it was necessary to be revenged. However, Carmina never took to him, in consequence of what he had done; and after a few months—it is sad to think of it, considering how fond they had once been of one another—he shot her, in a fit of exasperation."

It was with difficulty that Walter restrained himself from expressing his abhorrence not only of this narration, but of the narrator himself, who could speak of such things with such calmness and indifference; but he made no comment beyond a gesture of disgust. "And what is the story of Joanna?" inquired he.

"Well, Joanna's case was as it were the reverse of Carmina's; she too was in farm-service, and solicited by her master's son, whose affection she did not return. Some say she stabbed him, but Lavocca, whom I believe before anybody, denies that it was so. It was more probably the captain that did it, whom Joanna had informed of her persecutions. At all events she joined the band, and Lavocca, who was her inseparable companion, did likewise. They did not come, you must understand, signor, as

women mostly do, who take of their own free-will to our mountain life, after their lovers."

"I see. Joanna could not well have come without Lavocca, who, to keep her company, sacrificed her own prospects 'down yonder'"—Walter had already fallen into the brigand habit of describing the locality of civilized life by those two words. "It is no wonder that she is Joanna's friend."

"Indeed, she has a right to be so considered, signor, even though Joanna is a great lady. Talk of merit. There is a woman for you! She can shoot and swim, run like a deer, cook like an angel, and is withal so beautiful! Should anything happen to Corralli, I for one should range myself under her command—not this one's," and he jerked his finger contemptuously towards Corbara, who was still shrieking curses against his ill-luck.

"And notwithstanding all these accomplishments," inquired Walter, "is Joanna womanly and tender towards those persons who fall into her brother's hands?"

"Well, she has an eye for a handsome

fellow, it is said, whether he be bond or free," answered Santoro, laughing; "but that is what men are sure to say in any case."

Whether this man had wilfully misunderstood his question, being unwilling to give Joanna the cruel character she might deserve, or whether any other sort of tenderness than that he referred to was altogether out of Santoro's consideration, Walter could not determine. The information he had received was indeed but vague and general, but with that for the present he thought it prudent to be content. To exhibit curiosity was, in brigands' eyes, Francisco had once told him, to be plotting, and though Santoro seemed friendly disposed he had a stolid sense of professional duty, and it would be dangerous to excite his suspicions. "If Joanna likes handsome men, Santoro, you give her this," said Walter gravely, handing his companion the little portrait which he had now finished.

The delight of Santoro at this counterfeit presentment of himself, as he probably considered it, though it must be confessed Walter had taken care to flatter him, was extreme, and could only be likened to that of a savage who first sees himself in a mirror: his expressions of admiration were so loud that they attracted not only his mate Colletta, but the gamblers themselves, who came crowding about him like children at a peep-show.

"Wonderful!" "Fine!" "Excellent!" One would have thought that no one had sketched the human figure since Michael

Angelo's time.

"What is all this about?" broke in the rough tones of Corbara. He plucked the portrait from the hand of its original, and made as though he would have torn it in pieces.

"Stop!" cried Santoro in a voice shrill with passion; his musket, fortunately for his foe, was not within reach, but his hand sought the knife in his girdle. The next minute a blow from the lieutenant's pistol-stock levelled him, stunned and bleeding, to the ground. If the onslaught had been less violent, and Santoro had been able to take his own part in the matter, it is possible that he might have gained the

victory over his superior, for the feelings of the great majority of the band were clearly with him. They had even supplemented, as it were, his "Stop!" with several cries expressive of disapprobation at Corbara's meditated act of vandalism. But now that the man was down who might have proved their ringleader, authority was paramount, and neither tongue nor finger stirred in rebellion against it. Only Colletta quietly brought a handful of half-melted snow, and kneeling down beside his fallen comrade, proceeded to wipe the blood from his unconscious face. Nevertheless, it seemed to strike the bull-necked lieutenant that discipline had been sufficiently vindicated, and that even some sort of apology might be expected of him.

"This rubbish here," said he, still holding the sketch in his left hand, "is either worthless or dangerous. If it resembles the man, it is clear that it may be used to identify him, should this English dog ever gain his liberty. Would it be for your advantage if he took a portrait of every one of you, and stuck them up in Palermo, so that the soldiers should know you wherever you

moved? If, on the other hand, it is not like him, it is of no value to any one."

The logic might have been incontrovertible, but it waked no sound of approbation; for the fact was that every one of the party had been privately bent on getting his own portrait done in the same style.

"What you suggest might have had some sense, Corbara," observed Walter boldly, "had I intended to keep the sketch for myself; but I had given it to Santoro, and am willing to do the same for any one else who has a fancy for having his portrait taken, and a mistress to whom to send it."

He rightly guessed that it was a point of honour with these gentry that each should suppose himself, or at least have it supposed, that he was the object of some young woman's devotion; but in this case he had unconsciously hit a particular nail on the head, and sent it home. It was well known among the band that the lieutenant was an unsuccessful suitor for Lavocca's affections; and Walter's speech at once suggested to them that Corbara's wish to destroy the picture, as well as his subsequent argu-

ments, had arisen from jealousy; a passion in regard to which they themselves were as tinder to flame, but which amused them, when manifested in another, beyond everything.

"Come, come, lieutenant," said one, "what the signor says is reasonable enough; we need only show the pictures to whom we like—and who like us."

"Yes, and when shall we have such another chance?" pleaded another. "It is not as though we could go into the towns, and get our pictures taken by the sun for half a ducat, like those who live down yonder."

Walter did not trouble himself to listen to these arguments, or to the lieutenant's reply to them; he had found it hard enough to give the man the few civil words which he had bestowed upon him, with that spectacle of his brutality—the prostrate form of the unlucky Santoro—before his eyes. Now he had knelt down by the side of Colletta, and was assisting him in his simple ministrations to the wounded man. His impulse had been to spring at Corbara's throat, and do him such mischief as a moment's fury could

effect; but he had mastered it, and wisely. It would have been a Quixotic act indeed to bring death upon himself (for Corbara would to a certainty have killed him), and yet to fail in saving others, because one rogue was brutal and unjust to another. Still, Santoro had been friendly towards him, and he was not going to withhold the hand of sympathy from him, for fear of this insolent bully. As it happened, therefore, it was upon Walter's pitying face that the eyes of the poor brigand first opened upon his regaining consciousness.

"The picture!" murmured he. "Where is the picture for Lavocca?"

"You shall have it, or another," said Walter comfortingly. "Have you brandy?" inquired he of Canelli, whom the condition of the wounded man appeared to interest, not from tenderness of heart, but because blood had a natural attraction for him. "It will be the best medicine for your friend."

"I have a little," returned the juvenile homicide stolidly, "about as much as I want for myself. He shall have a drain of it, however, if you will draw my picture."

So it seemed that Lieutenant Corbara had

taken off his embargo upon art, and had graciously permitted his men to sit to Walter.

This permission was of no slight advantage to the prisoner, both immediate and remote. for not only did it put him on amicable terms with his patrons, but when the hour for the midday meal arrived, and with it only loaves of black bread, without even the raccolta of the previous evening, he found his loaf had been filled by some grateful hand with pieces of broiled kid. It was a contribution, Colletta whispered to him, from his sitters generally, but of which he was to say nothing because of Corbara, who would otherwise have deprived him of it: and he enjoyed it hugely, and none the less because he gave a share of it to Santoro. The poor fellow was little the worse for his mal-treatment—the blow had fortunately fallen upon his skull-and seemed in no resent it. Punishment under authority, as Walter had more than once occasion to observe, was not looked upon as an indignity among brigands, though they were quick enough to avenge an insult.

After dinner, the disadvantages of open-

air life became very perceptible in the shape of a driving rain, from which, in their elevated situation, there was but little shelter. It was intensely cold, and yet the brigands dared light no fire for fear of announcing the position of the camp to the soldiers. Nothing was to be done but for all (save the sentinels) to wrap themselves up in their capotes, and huddle together as close as sheep frightened by a dog. His companions, accustomed to sleep in the daytime and move at night, soon forgot their discomforts in slumber: but Walter was not so fortunate. He lay for hours listening to the sough of the wind, the swish of the rain, and had, as it seemed to him, only just fallen asleep, when a kick on the leg awoke him, accompanied by a rough order to "get up." It was fine overhead, though by no means clear, and the moon was rising, by the light of which—though the manner of his summons would have sufficiently established the man's identity—he perceived Corbara, his musket sloped over shoulder, and evidently prepared for departure.

"Santoro," said this worthy, in tones that

he endeavoured to make conciliatory, "you are still an invalid it seems" (and indeed the poor fellow, with his broken head bandaged with a napkin, through which much blood had flowed, looked by no means able-bodied); "so you will be excused from your attendance on the prisoner, and command in camp in my absence. Canelli will take your place upon the march."

"Pardon me, lieutenant," answered he firmly; "I am quite well now, and have received my orders direct from the captain; and I mean to obey them. Strike me again"—for Corbara was already feeling for his pistol, the barrel of which seemed as familiar to his fingers as the trigger doubtless was—" and you will have to settle with him the Who-shall-be-Master question a second time."

Even by that dim light Walter could see the lieutenant turn yellow with rage: the allusion was evidently a very bitter one, and yet one which he dared not resent.

"I shall have a word or two to say to the captain about you, my fine fellow," was his sole rejoinder.

"Just so; that is one of the reasons why

I intend to accompany you, lieutenant. It is only right he should hear both sides."

"I believe you to be half a traitor," answered Corbara fiercely. "You are quite unfit to be trusted with the care of a prisoner, you who receive gifts at his hands, and make yourself his friend. You require some one to look after you, and Canelli shall do it."

At these words the young recruit stepped up, gun in hand, with a malevolent grin, and stationed himself on Santoro's left. It. was an indignity, as Walter could perceive, which touched his old body-guard to the quick, who, next to Corbara, was the senior member of the band; but he said nothing. About a dozen brigands had been selected for the expedition, the rest remaining in camp. At the word "March!" given in quite a military style, they set out; but there was not much marching, in the ordinary sense. The ground did not even permit of a footpace; it was so steep that they had to run, except where the brushwood was so thick that they could make way through it with difficulty. Their course was eastward, but also, as Walter

fancied, towards the sea. Under the circumstances some straggling was absolutely necessary, and but that Canelli kept always close behind, and within striking distance of him, it would have been easy, with Santoro's connivance, to have his escape. In any case, however, as he judged, this connivance he would not have obtained. That Santoro detested his present leader, and was burning with indignation against him, was probable enough; even that he was favourably disposed towards his prisoner; but nevertheless Walter felt that had he made an effort to flee, this man would have drawn trigger on him as quickly as any of his fellows, nay, perhaps all the quicker, because his fidelity had been called That he was correct in this in question. opinion was shown by a trifling circumstance. After they had gone a mile or two they crossed a small stream, at which every one stooped to drink, for streams are rare in Sicily, and they had had nothing hitherto to quench their thirst save melted snow. Walter took the opportunity to wash his hands and face, which he had not done for twenty-four hours: his delay was not of VOL. II. 19

half a minute's duration, yet the purpose of it being misconstrued (and perhaps unintelligible, for brigands never wash), it almost cost him his life. "Get on, or I shoot!" cried Santoro, in a voice from which all friendliness had given way to a certain fierce ring of duty; and this was accompanied by the ominous click of three guns. Walter made some laughing remonstrance, and though the incident dashed certain vague hopes he had begun to cherish, did not permit it to interrupt his friendly relations with Santoro Nor did the latter appear to treat it otherwise than as a matter of official routine, such as no person holding commission from Il Capitano Corralli could have dispensed with.

"Can you guess, signor," said he, in a low voice, when they chanced to be crossing what was, by contrast, a piece of level ground, "why the lieutenant was so civil just now as to make me his deputy in his absence, if I would have accepted the honour?"

"To make up, I suppose, for his brutal attack upon you yesterday."

"No, no, signor; he is not one to eat his words nor to repent his deeds. He wished to keep me from seeing Lavocca. He wanted to have her all to himself."

"So we are going to join the ladies, are we?" inquired Walter, with a carelessness that he could ill assume. The thought that he was about to behold Lilian filled him with a wild delight, in spite of the sad circumstances under which their meeting must needs take place.

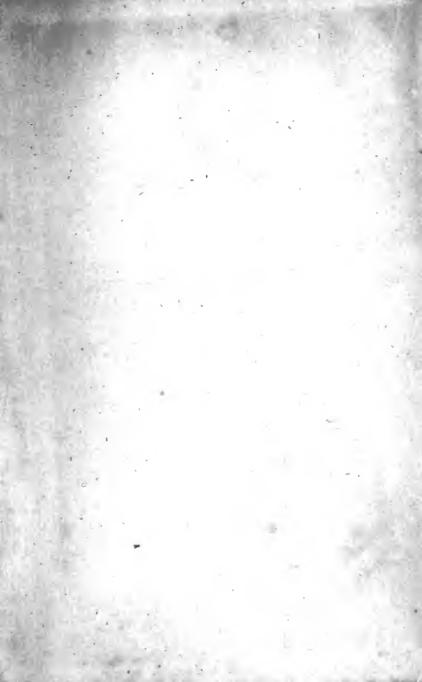
"Yes, I am sure of it. I saw that Corbara had put his rings on."

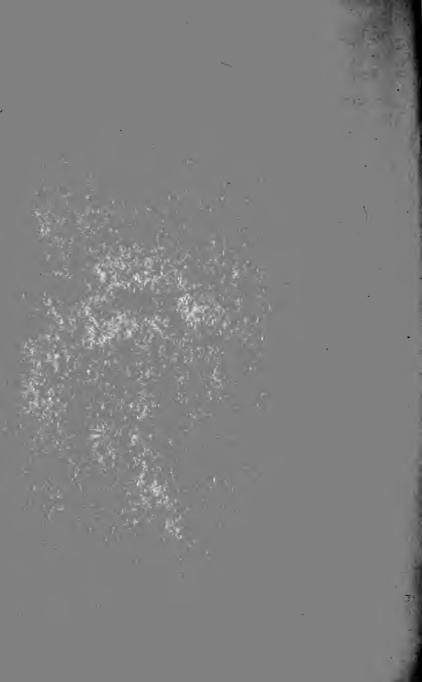
This statement was quite unintelligible to Walter, and an accession of speed on the part of his companions—for they used level ground as though it were a racecourse—prevented any explanation. Presently however, a halt was made for refreshment, and then he saw Santoro produce from his pockets a number of little tin boxes, containing various articles of jewellery, with which he proceeded with much gravity to adorn his person; just as a serious young man with us puts on his go-to-meeting coat, and makes his face to shine with yellow soap

before he goes a-courting. Walter guessed, from these preparations, that they were near the termination of their journey; but, for the rest of the way, the party moved much more slowly, and with exceeding They had now got "down vigilance. yonder," where honest people were to be found (in moderate numbers), and even people whose mission it was to put down brigands: a large and fertile valley, through which ran a high road which they crossed with the most elaborate precautions, sending scouts to left and right, and then flitting athwart it with the swiftness and silence of a shadow. Here was another mountain to be climbed, not so steep as that whose summit they had lately occupied, but much more wooded and difficult; and ever and anon they stopped, as if in doubt, and as though the place was new to them. At these times it seemed to Walter that he could hear the soft murmur of the tideless Mediterranean: but when he expressed that belief, Colletta jeered at it, and told him the coast was not within five leagues of them. Walter had by this time discovered, however, that notwithstanding Captain Corralli was so exacting from his captives in the way of truth, this was the very last commodity to be expected from the members of his band: they lied to their prisoners, they lied to one another, and if they gave themselves any trouble to prove to their own minds that they had any justification for their mode of life, they most unquestionably lied to themselves; therefore Walter stuck to his opinion as respected his propinguity to the sea. It somehow pleased him to think that it was so. To be taken inland, was to be removed farther from the hope of escape, and, as it seemed to him, from the neighbourhood of Lilian. He conjectured that it would have been impossible for the brigands to have carried her very far from the coast, and the course of the present expedition had corroborated that The dawn had now broken fair conviction. and calm, yet so woody was the mountain on whose slope they were, that it seemed still dusk. Again and again Corbara put his fingers to his lips, and whistled the brigand note, and waited for a reply in vain.

But at last he was answered. Sweet and low, the kissing call stole down from the summit of the mountain, so mellowed by distance, and rendered so harmonious by time and place, that Walter hardly recognised it for what it was.

END OF VOL. II.







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